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Understanding Donald Trump's inconsistent foreign policy through psychological assessments: the case of North Korea

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ABSTRACT

Vilas Boas VHR. Understanding Donald Trump's inconsistent foreign policy through psychological assessments: the case of North Korea. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, Instituto de Relações Internacionais, 2023.

This thesis is dedicated to an analysis of the Trump administration's foreign policy, which is widely understood as inconsistent and incoherent. In order to understand these characteristics, I hypothesize that the Trump administration's foreign policy was inconsistent and incoherent because it was deeply influenced by the president's personality. To build this analysis, I first outline the absence of a Trump Grand Strategy or a Trump Doctrine, or any type of guiding principle that could comprehensively explain the Trump administration's foreign policy. Out of the few distinguishable patterns in Trump's international behavior, this thesis explores his populist approach and his centralization of decision-making processes, strengthening the argument that Trump's personal traits might have played an important role in his foreign policy. To test the outlined hypothesis, I draw on Leadership Trait Analysis' assumptions and methods, assessing Trump's personality through at-a-distance content analysis. Drawing on the literature on leadership styles, I draw hypotheses about Trump's foreign policy decision-making behavior from his personal traits and compare these with his actual behavior regarding North Korea, which was the selected case for analysis. Results show that the hypotheses drawn from Trump's personality are consistent with his actual foreign policy behavior in U.S diplomacy towards North Korea, which allows us to understand Trump's personal characteristics as causal mechanisms in his decision-making process in this case. In that sense, the inconsistency and incoherence of his foreign policy could be understood as the result of a sum of foreign policy issues that were not strongly defined by ideology or strategy, but were highly influenced by the president's personal characteristics.

Keywords: Leadership Trait Analysis; Populism; Donald Trump; Foreign Policy Analysis.

RESUMO

Vilas Boas VHR. Understanding Donald Trump's inconsistent foreign policy through psychological assessments: the case of North Korea [dissertação]. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, Instituto de Relações Internacionais, 2023.

Esta dissertação se dedica a analisar a política externa da administração Trump, que é amplamente entendida como inconsistente e incoerente. Para entender essas características, é feita a hipótese de que a política externa da administração Trump foi inconsistente e incoerente porque era profundamente influenciada pela personalidade do presidente. Para construir esta análise, primeiramente expõe-se a ausência de uma Grande Estratégia ou Doutrina Trump, ou qualquer tipo de princípio guiador que poderia explicar a política externa da administração Trump de maneira abrangente. Dentre os poucos padrões distinguíveis no comportamento internacional de Trump, esta dissertação explora a abordagem populista e a centralização dos processos de tomada de decisão, fortalecendo o argumento de que as características pessoais de Trump podem ter desempenhado um importante papel em sua política externa. Para testar a hipótese proposta, eu me apoio nas suposições e métodos da Análise de Traços de Liderança, avaliando a personalidade de Trump através de análises de conteúdo à distância. Apoiando-me na literatura sobre estilos de liderança, crio hipóteses sobre o comportamento de tomada de decisão de Trump em política externa a partir de suas características pessoais, comparando estas hipóteses com o real comportamento de Trump em relação à Coreia do Norte, o caso selecionado para essa análise. Os resultados mostram que as hipóteses geradas a partir da personalidade de Trump são consistentes com seu real comportamento na diplomacia dos Estados Unidos para a Coreia do Norte, o que nos permite entender as características pessoais de Trump como mecanismos causais em seus processos de tomada de decisão no caso referido. Neste sentido, é possível entender a inconsistência e incoerência da política externa de Trump como o resultado da soma de questões de política externa que não foram fortemente definidas por ideologia ou estratégia, mas foram altamente influenciadas pelas características pessoais do presidente.

Palavras-chave: Análise de Traços de Liderança; Populismo; Donald Trump; Análise de Política Externa.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Even a few years after his departure from the White House, Donald Trump's foreign policy is still subject to debate and bears fruit to many different analyses and (in)conclusions. Trump's international strategy broke with long-lasting paradigms in American foreign policy, but it is still difficult to make comprehensive statements about what drove the Trump administration's international agenda. This characterless foreign policy is even highlighted by Trump's White House insiders:

> Trump is not a neoconservative or a paleoconservative, neither a traditional realist nor a liberal internationalist, has caused endless confusion. The same goes for the fact that he has no inborn inclination to isolationism or interventionism, and he is not simply a dove or a hawk. His foreign policy doesn't easily fit into any of these categories, though it draws from all of them (Anton, 2019, p. 1).

More than the lack of an organizing principle, it is argued that the Trump administration didn't have a cohesive international strategy whatsoever. Throughout his election campaign, Trump promised to brake with the establishment's consensus on foreign policy and review most of the traditional patterns in the American international strategy. The establishment's consensus on United States' foreign policy is usually understood as the bipartisan informal agreement regarding the principles and values that should guide United States' global strategy. Since World War II, when the United States emerged as one of the great powers of the international bipolar system, American international strategy has revolved around the construction and maintenance of what became known as the international liberal order. The international liberal order encompasses the international organizations, institutions, principles, and values that were understood as a priority for western countries in the aftermath of World War II. Among the core principles of the international liberal order, there are multilateralism, free-trade, liberal democracy, and the respect for human rights, which resulted in the creation of institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and many others.

From the 1940s to the 2010s, every American president prioritized the expansion and maintenance of the international liberal order, which was sponsored by the United States and built according to its interests. Of course, each president had different foreign policy priorities, but each one of them, independently of party, had the international liberal order's principles as guidelines for international strategy. Donald Trump, although, was the first

American president since World War II to be actively hostile to the core principles of the international order. Trump disengaged the United States from multiple multilateral institutions and jeopardized the operation of organizations he did not leave, withdrew the United States from a series of multilateral trade agreements, and adopted a mercantilist approach to international trade, using the imposition of tariffs to initiate trade wars. On human rights and the promotion of liberal democracy, Trump claimed that it was not the United States' job to lecture other countries on what to do on those issues.

Besides from not developing a clearly defined Grand Strategy, the Trump administration also did not manage to build something worth of being called a doctrine. The absence of guiding principles and clearly defined priorities, as well as the frequent flip-flops in international decision-making, led many analysts to assert that Trump crafted an "unpredictability doctrine", in which the president was purposefully being unpredictable to leave both allies and enemies guessing and, as such, having more leverage and room for maneuver in his international strategy. Some scholars assign this "unpredictability" to Trump's personal erratism and lack of experience, as well as to the peculiar decision-making dynamics within his administration's foreign policy. Although popular among Foreign Policy Analysis' scholars, the idea of unpredictability in foreign affairs was only mentioned by Trump during his presidential campaign, and did not appear in statements or speeches since, which raises the possibility of "unpredictability" being a convenient term to reverse-engineer Trump's policies and create justifications for his erratic impulses.

To summarize, the Trump administration abandoned the principles and values that guided American Grand Strategy since the 1940s and was not able to build an international strategy consistent and coherent enough to be called a doctrine, creating a foreign policy that presented historical discontinuity with the bipartisan agreement on the international liberal order and was internally amorphous, as it had no clear guiding principles or policy priorities. In that sense, *this thesis is dedicated to understanding the reasons for the lack of consistency and coherence in Trump's foreign policy. I hypothesize that the Trump administration was not able to establish a consistent and coherent international strategy because foreign policy decisions were highly influenced by Donald Trump's personal characteristics.*

This hypothesis is sustained by two assumptions regarding foreign policy decision-making within the Trump administration: (i) Trump's populism made his foreign policy decision-making more personal and centralized; (ii) Trump was able to dominate the decision-making processes within his administration, acting with little to no constrains from his cabinet or bureaucracy.

Although there is no consensus on the guiding principles of Trump's international strategy, there is wide consensus about Trump being considered a populist and about his foreign policy being clearly influenced by his populism. Trump's Jacksonian ethno-nationalist rhetoric sought to oppose conservative white-American workers to the global elites and global minority groups, creating the idea that life in America was not as good as before because the globalist elites were taking advantage of the United States and, as such, the country needed to review its international strategy by putting "America First" in order to "Make America Great Again". Trump's populism was also displayed in his political strategy and style, as he managed foreign policy issues through direct, unmediated, and uninstitutionalized channels, prioritizing the organization of face-to-face summits with other leaders and the use of social media platforms such as Twitter. Trump's populist repertoire also encompassed "bad manners", especially through aggressive language towards other world leaders, in a style that "emphasizes agitation, spectacular acts, exaggeration, calculated provocations, and the intended breech of political and socio-cultural taboos" (Heinisch, 2003, p. 94).

Populism and its effects on foreign policy decision-making have been increasingly studied in Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations at large. Among the findings of recent research on the link between foreign policy and populism, Destradi and Plagemann (2019) argue that

> Centralization under populist leaders is not only more pronounced but also more personal. The anti-pluralist dimension of populism entails the claim that only the populist leader – and nobody else – can speak in the name of the 'true' people. As a consequence, the populist leader will be more personally involved in foreign policymaking (Destradi; Plagemann, 2019, p. 724).

Relying on this assumption and considering Trump as a populist *par excellence*, it is fair to assume that the Trump administration's foreign policy decision-making became more personal and highly centralized in Trump's image. This assumption is corroborated by an assessment of the decision-making dynamics in Trump's foreign policy. In the first week of his government, Trump fired dozens of bureaucrats from the State Department, and answered questions about the layoffs by saying that "I'm the only one that matters, because when it comes to it, that's what the policy is going to be" (Trump, 2017). The 45th president of the United States was widely known for despising the foreign policy intelligence community and making decisions as he pleased, even though Trump had no prior foreign policy experience – or any political experience whatsoever. Throughout his four years in the White House, Trump had four different National Security Advisors and two different Secretaries of State. Many

scholars relate these constant changes to Trump's personality, as the president didn't cope well with officials who had different point of views.

As such, it is reasonable to argue that Trump dominated the foreign policy decision-making dynamics within his administration and was the predominant leader in defining and applying United States' international strategy. Combining that argument with the previous assumption about the influence of Trump's populism in his decision-making, the hypothesis that *Trump's foreign policy was incoherent and inconsistent because it was deeply influenced by the president's personality* is strengthened: his populist approach to foreign affairs made his decisions more centralized and personal, while the decision-making dynamics he created for his administration showed no constraints to his personal and centralized decisions.

This hypothesis about Trump's personality influencing his foreign policy decision-making relies on psychological assessments of the former U.S president, which indicate that *Trump displays a personality that is open to information, challenges constraints, and is relationship-oriented*. The assessment of political leaders' personalities has been growing in Foreign Policy Analysis literature in the recent years (Rathbun et al., 2016; Kertzer; Tingley, 2018), although these types of contributions are not new to FPA. As an agent-oriented subfield (Hudson, 2005), Foreign Policy Analysis drew many assumptions, concepts, and frameworks from the field of Political Psychology. Early writings addressed the psychological environment of foreign policy decision makers and sought to recreate the decision-makers' cognitive processes (Snyder; Bruck; Sapin, 1954; Sprout; Sprout, 1956). Inspired by psychoanalytic theory, some approaches used biographical analysis to infer leader's personalities and their impacts on political decision-making (George; George, 1956; Post, 2003; Barber, 1972). A different strand of research delved into cognitive analysis, shedding a light on policy decisions through an assessment of leaders' processes of reasoning and its heuristics (Jervis, 1976; Holsti, 1976; Rosati, 2000); more relevant to this thesis, there is a good deal of scholarship dedicated to understanding leaders' personality traits, categorizing personal characteristics and profiles through the study of personality features such as beliefs (Larson, 1994; Walker; Schafer; Young, 1998), motivations (Winter et al., 1991; Winter, 2018), and interpersonal dynamics (Hermann, 1980, 2003), elucidating how leaders understand themselves, others, and how that affects political decisions.

Drawing from all these contributions on the assessment of leaders' personalities, Margaret Hermann (1980, 1999, 2003) built the Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) framework, combining seven personality traits (belief in ability to control events, conceptual complexity, distrust of others, in-group bias, need for power, self-confidence and task orientation) to

create a comprehensive and measurable framework of politically relevant personal characteristics. Combinations of these traits indicate more general aspects about a leader's personality, such as openness to information, respect towards constraints, and motivation for seeking office. Both the individual traits and the more general personality features indicate certain trends towards political behavior and decision-making style (Hermann, 2003).

These psychological traits are assessed through content analysis, which is the foundation of at-a-distance personality assessments, based on the assumption that what is publicly said by a political leader reflects their personality. Winter and Stewart define content analysis as "a technique for making psychological inferences about politically relevant aspects of the personality of political actors from the systematic, objective study of written and transcribed oral material" (Winter; Stewart, 1977, p. 29). In other types of psychological assessments, the documents analyzed can and should vary in nature and context. In Leadership Trait Analysis, although, as we wish to access leaders' personality traits, the nature of the documents selected should match some patterns of spontaneity, to avoid the possibility of ghost-writing and pre-made answers. Once the data is assembled, the content analysis process is done through ProfilerPlus, a Social Science Automation software that codes and scores the texts into the seven personality traits, generating scores from 0 to 1 for of the seven leadership traits.

In this thesis, we rely on the Leadership Trait Analysis framework to assess Donald Trump's personality traits, using trait scores drawn from Thiers and Wehner (2022), who have built a database of 1.073.472 words with Trump's responses from interviews with the media. This data is then compared with a database of 284 world leaders, which provides us with mean scores and standard deviations to analyze the data regarding Trump. Leaders are considered high or low in a given trait when they score above or below one standard deviation from the comparison group average. With Trump's leadership trait scores at hand, we're able to empirically assess his personality traits and attest that he is *open to information, challenges constraints, and is relationship-oriented.*

As personality traits indicate trends for foreign policy behavior, we're finally able to test the argument that Trump's foreign policy was incoherent and inconsistent because it was deeply influenced by his personality. To do so, I analyze what seems to be the most "Trumpian" case of his foreign policy: American diplomacy towards North Korea. The Trump administration's approach to North Korea was remarkably incoherent and inconsistent. Few days after Trump's inauguration, North Korea launched ballistic missiles, which was perceived as a threat by the United States – if not objectively, symbolically. These missile

tests led Trump to dedicate many *tweets* and even his first address to the United Nations General Assembly to offending and threatening Kim Jon-Un. Trump threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea with "fire and fury like the world has never seen" and called Kim Jon-Un "Little Rocket Man"; Kim replied by calling Trump a "mentally deranged dotard". These threats and insults were fueled by the Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign on North Korea, expressed in unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States and American military exercises alongside South Korea in the Korean peninsula.

The diplomacy between both countries changed course in the beginning of 2018, when the United States and South Korea postponed military exercises in the Korean peninsula because of the upcoming Winter Olympics. The gesture was well-received by Kim Jon-Un and, from that moment on, North Korean and American officials met on multiple occasions, as Trump and Kim began to exchange friendly letters. This personal approximation between the two leaders led to meetings in Singapore, Hanoi, and in the Korean Demilitarized Zone, where Trump became the first American president to step into North Korean soil. Although promising, these meetings did not lead to any formal agreement or commitment, and ended up only serving photo op purposes.

In sum, the Trump administration's foreign policy towards North Korea had two diametrically opposed moments, with policy changes that are difficult to understand. From threatening North Korea with fire and fury to being the first president to step into North Korean soil, Trump *freestyled* his foreign policy decision-making in movements that were reportedly uncoordinated with his team and, by the end of his term, did not lead to any concrete measures. As Trump's diplomacy with North Korea was incoherent, inconsistent, and very personal, it was selected as the case to be analyzed through Trump's personality traits. As such, the goal of this assessment is to find *causal mechanisms* that link Trump's personality traits to the foreign policy decisions in American diplomacy towards North Korea, defining causal mechanisms as "processes operating inside the individual and connecting environment and outcomes" (Walker; Post, 2003, p. 76).

Having found, through the methods within the Leadership Trait Analysis framework, that Trump is open to information, challenges constraints, and is a relationship-oriented leader, we draw on the literature to create hypotheses about Trump's foreign policy behavior according to his leadership style, later comparing these hypotheses to Trump's actual foreign policy decision-making regarding North Korea. If the hypotheses regarding Trump's expected behavior are sustained, we should have a very reasonable argument for validating this thesis' hypothesis, asserting that the Trump administration foreign policy towards North Korea was

inconsistent and incoherent because it was influenced by the president's personality, allowing for the extrapolation of that argument to different cases within Trump's foreign policy.

This thesis follows the latest developments within the field of International Relations and the subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis. Both RI and FPA have been looking more closely to the first-image and praising the relevance of leadership in foreign policy outcomes. With the rise to power of characters such as Trump, these first-image analyses not only became more frequent, but also more psychologically oriented. Conversely, studies on the link between populism and foreign policy have gained prominence, with special attention to the impact of populist leadership in foreign policy formulation and decision-making. In this context, this thesis seeks to contribute to both these strands of research, addressing the relevance of Trump's personality in his foreign policy and the concept of populism as an important category in foreign policy framing and behavior. This thesis also contributes to the growing literature on the effects of Trump's personality in his political behavior, differentiating itself from other contributions through the exploration of the links between populism and a personalized foreign policy, as well as the insightful research design that assigns the Trump administration's amorphous foreign policy to the personality of the 45th American president.

Considering the presented framework, the first chapter of this thesis is dedicated to an overview of the Trump administration's foreign policy. Through the organizing concepts of Grand Strategy and Doctrine, the first section of the chapter discusses Trump's disengagement from the international liberal order, the discontinuity with the patterns of American Grand Strategy, the lack of guiding principles on Trump's foreign policy, and the concept of unpredictability, as well as its usages in the literature regarding the Trump administration. The second section deals with the concept of populism, explaining its presence in Trump's foreign policy and discussing the effects of populist leadership on foreign policy decision-making. The third section accounts for the decision-making dynamics within the Trump administration, showcasing how Trump managed to dominate his cabinet and enforce his preferences on foreign policy decisions, making his foreign policy more centralized and personalized; this last section also briefly review other studies that link Trump's personality to his administration's decision-making dynamics.

Chapter two is dedicated to presenting the conceptual tools through which the analysis of Trump's personal characteristics will be performed. In the first section, I briefly review the literature on leadership and Political Psychology, relating these research agendas to the ground of Foreign Policy Analysis as a subfield and review the literature on the assessment of

leader's personalities, presenting conceptual and methodological tools to understand the psychology of political leaders. In the second section, the Leadership Trait Analysis framework is presented, with a discussion of its core concepts, methodology, and recent contributions.

The third chapter connects the first and the second chapters through the case analysis of Trump's diplomacy towards North Korea. In the first section, I discuss the methods within Leadership Trait Analysis, present Trump's leadership trait scores, and outline his expected foreign policy behavior according to the trait results. In the second section, I review the Trump administration's diplomacy towards North Korea, discussing the main events of the bilateral relationship. In the third section, I compare the expected foreign policy behavior according to Trump's leadership style to his actual behavior in the diplomacy with North Korea, searching for causal mechanisms between his personality and his foreign policy decisions. The thesis is closed with final remarks and suggestions for future research.

1 SEARCHING FOR CONSISTENCY AND COHERENCE: GRAND STRATEGIES, DOCTRINES, POPULISM, AND DECISION-MAKING DYNAMICS

Even a few years after the end of his presidency, Trump's foreign policy is still one of the most debated topics in International Relations. The 45th president of the United States challenged mainstream foreign policy positions, deviating from routes that were established in the post-World War II period. The changes in United States' foreign policy forwarded by the Trump administration ran counter to the foundational concepts of the international liberal order, a set of principles, norms and institutions that have been the angular stone of American foreign policy since the 1940s. Both in discourse and practice, Trump contested the relevance of principles such as free-trade, multilateralism, liberal democracy, and human-rights, dismantling important multilateral agreements and questioning the efficacy of decades-long alliances. Although clearly critical of the foreign policy establishment that had dominated American foreign policy for the last seven decades, Trump did not seem to have a new clearly defined framework for the United States' international strategy, which led journalists, scholars, and political commentators to criticize the lack of cohesion and coherence in Trump's foreign policy.

As this thesis is dedicated to explaining the reasons for the lack of coherence and cohesion in Trump's foreign policy, the first section seeks to provide an overview of the Trump administration's international strategy. In the search for cohesion and coherence, this analysis relies on two major American foreign policy ideas: Grand Strategy and Doctrine, attempting to define whether or not Trump's foreign policy can be comprehensively explained within these concepts. Regarding Grand Strategy, Trump's foreign policy is addressed from a historical point of view to highlight the changes it brought to the United States' international strategy, especially regarding the international liberal order and its core principles and institutions. With reference to Doctrine, the analysis searches for any sense of internal cohesion that guided Trump's foreign policy in an attempt to define if we could or couldn't talk about a "Trump Doctrine".

As the first section falls short in its search for cohesion and coherence in Trump's foreign policy, it ends with a hypothesis for this lack of cohesion and coherence: *the Trump administration's foreign policy was characterless and inconsistent because it was highly influenced by Trump's personality*. This hypothesis is followed up and supported by the next sections in the first chapter.

The second section is dedicated to an analysis of what seems to be one of the few principles that regularly appear in Trump's foreign policy: populism. The concept of populism provides internal cohesion to Trump's policies abroad, helping observers to make sense of his actions through form, but not content. Populism also provides a better understanding about Trump's influence on decision-making processes, once populist leaders tend to dominate decision-making groups and shape policies according to their personal preferences. As such, by attesting that Trump is a populist *par excellence* and that his foreign policy was affected by his populism, we are able to argue that his populism made the foreign policy decision-making dynamics within his administration more personal and centralized around him.

The build-up from the second section leads us to the third section, where we explore the assertions that Trump's foreign policy was centralized and personalized through a detailed assessment of his administration's decision-making dynamics. Through an understanding of these dynamics and processes, we are able to show that Trump's foreign policy was very susceptible to the president's personal preferences, who would constantly dismiss advice from the intelligence team, advisers, and cabinet, to "follow his instinct".

1.1 Is there a Trump Grand Strategy or a Trump Doctrine?

The concept of Grand Strategy is probably one of the most useful tools to students of American foreign policy. As defined by Brands, a Grand Strategy denotes

> the integrated set of concepts that gives purpose and direction to a country's dealings with the world. (…) [it] is the intellectual framework that connects means to ends, ideas to action, at the highest level of national affairs; it is a country's guiding conception of where it wants to go and how it seeks to get there (Brands, 2018, p. 6).

Similarly, Sjostedt defines a Grand Strategy as "a publicly expressed set of statements regarding the constitution of the international system, the own state's role within that system, and how the system and the state are subjected to a threat" (Sjostedt, 2007, p. 235). As it is made clear by Sjostedt's definition, a Grand Strategy is built in reference to the international system and the country's position in it, drawing from historical processes.

Since the end of World War II, United States' Grand Strategy has been guided by the core principles established in the post-war order, commonly referred to as the international liberal order. The international liberal order can be described as a set of principles, institutions and norms that helped coordinate international governance, especially in the Western world. Throughout the Cold War period, the liberal order was key to United States' Grand Strategy, helping shape Western governance towards economic openness and co-binding security agreements (Ikenberry, 2018; Jahn, 2018; Drezner; Krebs; Schweller, 2020; Restad, 2020).

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in the beginning of the 1990's, liberal internationalism was widely acknowledged as the "winning" politico-ideological system (Fukuyama, 1992; Keohane, 2005; Williamson, 1990). Boosted by the international system's unipolar moment, characterized by the United States' military, political, and economical supremacy (Krauthammer, 1990/1991), the liberal order expanded through the advancements of principles such as

> openness, sovereign equality, respect for human rights, democratic accountability, widely shared economic opportunity, and the muting of great power rivalry, as well as collective efforts to keep the peace, promote the rule of law, and sustain an array of international institutions tailored to solving and managing common global problems (Deudney; Ikenberry, 1999, p. 7).

From a structural perspective, Mearsheimer (2020) highlights that, after the end of the Cold War, the United States were able to engage in the building of an "ideological order",

where the system's hegemon seeks to export its political system and values to other countries. As such, American foreign policy since the early 1990's has prioritized the promotion of liberal and democratic Western values, in an effort to standardize political systems around the world through the imposition of the liberal order's principles, norms, and institutions (Acharya, 2014; Stuenkel, 2016; Ikenberry, 2014).

Of course, there were different approaches to this advancement of Western liberal and democratic values. Bush, for instance, adopted the neoconservative unilateralism as a method for democracy promotion in the Middle East, disregarding the importance of multilateral consensus and disrespecting human rights to enforce regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan (Santos; Teixeira, 2013; Brands, 2016). Although the use of force as a tool to advance foreign policy interests rejected important features of liberal internationalism, such as multilateral decision-making institutions, treaties, and foreign aid, it still retained core principles of the international liberal order, such as "a continued faith in democracy and freedom, which were seen as important guarantors of peace" (Ashbee; Hurst, 2020, p. 6).

In 2009, when Obama came into office, multilateralism regained its primacy in U.S Grand Strategy, as the Democrat worked towards

> efforts on nuclear arms treaties, […] a ground-breaking international global climate agreement and the controversial nuclear agreement with Iran. He tried vigorously to push through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement. His approach to fighting international terrorism and the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria attempted to be multilateral. He employed US troops there and in Afghanistan, although not fully as a fighting force, with the goal of extricating the United States quickly at some point—sooner rather than later (Shapiro, 2018, p. 128)

Although the Obama administration maintained troops in the Middle East and led military interventions, such as the one in Libya, it did so in multilateral efforts and with the fundamental objective of "turning foes into friends" (Ayerbe, 2019).

In sum, United States' Grand Strategy since 1945 has been guided by the core principles of the international liberal order, such as multilateralism, respect for human rights, liberal democracy, and free-trade. After the end of the Cold War, which resulted in an unipolar moment in the international system, this liberal order expanded to more countries and became more influent as a set of principles, institutions, and norms to guide international governance. Although with different emphasis and methods, every American president since World War II has built a Grand Strategy considering the expansion and deepening of the international liberal order and its core principles (Brands, 2016; Busby; Monten, 2018).

After seven decades of a more or less cohesive and coherent international strategy, United States' foreign policy changed fundamentally under Donald Trump. The 45th president of the United States challenged the core principles of the international liberal order, launching a deliberate attack on multilateral institutions, abandoning multilateral agreements, questioning the efficiency of consolidated alliances, supporting authoritarian governments and leaders, disrespecting human rights – both at home and abroad –, and working against free-trade (Karkour, 2021; Ülgül, 2020; Ikenberry, 2018; MacDonald, 2018; Brands, 2018).

Regarding multilateralism, Trump: withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade agreement that represented 40% of the global economy; withdrew the United States from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), allegedly in protest of these organizations' repeated criticism of Israel; withdrew the United States from the World Health Organization (WHO) during the Covid-19 pandemic, failing to cooperate multilaterally on the efforts to reduce the pandemic impact; withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, under the argument that the commitments to control climate change would hurt the American economy; withdrew the United States from the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA); and withdrew the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

In relation to the United States' traditional alliances, Trump questioned the efficiency and relevance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), accusing European allies of free-riding and withdrawing troops from Europe. While questioning the relevance of these long-lasting alliances, Trump grew closer to many authoritarian leaders, such as Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman, Turkey's Recep Tayip Erdoğan, North Korea's Kim Jon-Un, Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte, and Egypt's Abdul Fatal Al-Sisi. Trump also had a very ambiguous and controversial relationship with Russian president Vladimir Putin, the authoritarian leader of one of the United States' most relevant strategic rivals. Regarding the promotion of human rights, Trump said that it was not the United States' duty to lecture other countries on how to deal with the human rights agenda, abandoning one of the most relevant guiding principles of American Foreign Policy. On free-trade, Trump imposed a series of tariffs on steel and aluminum from a wide range of countries, started a trade war with China in an attempt to balance the United States' enormous trade deficit with the country, and sought to undermine the World Trade Organization (WTO), refusing to allow the appointment of judges to the WTO's Appellate Body, jeopardizing the organization's ability to adjudicate trade disputes.

These examples elucidate the Trump administration's attack on the most important principles and institutions of the international liberal order that the United States had been actively building since World War II. As Brands highlights,

> Trump has left his own distinctive, and largely destructive, mark on U.S. strategy. For rather than using his nationalist credentials constructively, to strengthen America's engagement with the international system it created, Trump has, in words and deeds alike, seemed to take dead aim at many of the core ideas and practices that have made Washington such an effective—indeed, exceptional—global leader. The president surely believes that his policies will maximize American wealth, power, and independence in a remorselessly competitive global arena. In practice, however, Trump's initiatives and mannerisms are serving primarily to diminish the American superpower, and to intensify the stresses on a system that has served Washington and so many others so well for so long (Brands, 2018, p. 138).

In sum, Trump's foreign policy was clearly disruptive of America's long-lasting Grand Strategy of building and deepening the international liberal order, abandoning the guiding principles that drove American foreign policy in the post-war world. Both in discourse and in practice, the Trump administration actively opposed the core principles and institutions of the international liberal order, redirecting America's engagement with the international system across an array of issues.

As Trump himself expressed multiple times, he sought to change foreign policy paradigms that promised peace and prosperity but delivered war and division (Bacevich, 2021). Indeed, his administration managed to disrupt the "establishment's" foreign policy, but there is still debate about whether or not Trump was able to build a Grand Strategy to replace the foreign policy elites' approach to the international order. As such, it is important to address the different interpretations about Trump's international strategy, starting by one of the Trump administration's favorite concepts: the idea of principled realism.

The National Security Strategy issued by the Trump administration in 2017 asserts that

> This strategy is guided by principled realism. It is realist because it acknowledges the central role of power in international politics, affirms that sovereign states are the best hope for a peaceful world, and clearly defines our national interests. It is principled because it is grounded in the knowledge that advancing American principles spreads peace and prosperity around the globe. We are guided by our values and disciplined by our interests (National Security Strategy, 2017, p. 55).

It can be argued that Trump's foreign policy was, in many aspects, realist. Throughout his four years in the White House, Trump centered his international strategy around the idea

of competition and the primacy of American interests on a zero-sum logic world stage, summarized in the slogan "America First" (Schweller, 2018; Ashbee; Hurst, 2020) and inspired by the 1930's isolationism (Gonçalves; Teixeira, 2019). This approach implies that the United States should prioritize its domestic interests on the international system, abandoning the long-lasting guiding principles of democracy promotion, humanitarian aid, and free trade. As Brands acknowledges,

> the central organizing principle of Trump's statecraft has been the idea that America is systematically exploited as a result of the arrangements it has constructed— free trade pacts, alliances, international organizations—and that the country will only become prosperous and powerful again if it accepts that global affairs are fundamentally a zero-sum game (Brands, 2018, p. 144)

Although the concept of realism is usually related to security considerations, Trump's realism was more present in his approach to international institutions and agreements, especially regarding trade. Even in the international security realm, his dealings with allies had an economic bias, which is clear in Trump's approach to the NATO, where the priority was to make European countries "pay their fair share" (Ettinger, 2019). Also, many of Trump's alliances in the international system were not guided by "national interests" but rather by ideological and cultural affinity, as Trump himself acknowledged multiple times (Chryssogelos, 2021).

As for principled, the story is quite different. As mentioned before, Trump's foreign policy lacked guiding principles and actively challenged the principles that had been the angular stone of American Grand Strategy since World War II. In challenging the establishment's foreign policy and the institutions of the international liberal order, the Trump administration abandoned any kind of defining moral purpose that could guide its international strategy in a coherent manner (Ashbee; Hurst, 2020). The guiding principles that carried U.S. foreign policy through the last seven decades, such as free-trade, liberal democracy, respect for human rights, and multilateralism, were not only abandoned by the Trump administration but actively attacked by it. In fact, the very ideas that underlie Trump's realism, such as his zero-sum view of the world, his disengagement from promoting liberal values, and his constant flattering of authoritarian leaders (Karkour, 2021), create the unviability for a principled foreign policy.

Besides from ideas derived from the concept of principled realism, there are many other approaches to Trump's alleged Grand Strategy. Murat Ülgül (2020) claims that the Trump administration had built an "unintended grand strategy", born from the interaction of

the two major forces guiding Trump's foreign policy: his nationalism and the foreign policy establishment's traditionalism. As such, the Grand Strategy in Trump administration resulted from a constant interaction between these two guiding forces. Trump's nationalism would disengage the United States from "foreign policy adventures", such as military interventions in other countries; antithetically, the foreign policy establishment's traditionalism would lead the United States to engage in international conflicts in order to counterbalance the influence of other great powers in the international system (Ülgül, 2020).

Hal Brands (2018) also argues that the Trump administration has built an "unintended grand strategy", but for different reasons. According to him, grand strategic decision-making in unavoidable, since any presidents will always have to make decisions regarding key issues. Notwithstanding this assertion about the inevitability of grand strategic decision-making, Brands claims that Trump did not build a coherent Grand Strategy. A similar argument is forwarded by Kitchen (2020), who argues that Trump's decisions were mostly driven by chaotic and incoherent impulses and, as such, cannot be deemed as a strategy.

There are also scholars that assert that the very concept of Grand Strategy is no longer useful in the second decade of the 21st century. Dombrowski and Reich (2017), for example, claim that presidential leadership is no longer determinative of a Grand Strategy, as it was during the Cold War. They argue that the shifting international system, the national security bureaucracy, and the operational constraints in American foreign policy make it impossible for any president to develop and apply a coherent Grand Strategy. Writing only six months into the Trump administration, the authors were not able to observe most of Trump's foreign policy actions, and acknowledge that it was "clearly premature to make definitive judgements" about the forthcoming strategies, although, at the time, there was already no clear path forward and a lot of variance in policies, which they define as "calibrated strategies" (Dombrowski, Reich, 2017, p. 1035).

Drezner, Krebs, and Schweller (2020) advance a similar argument, asserting that the concept of Grand Strategy is only useful in predictable environments, where policymakers have a clear understanding of the world's power dynamics and enjoy a strong domestic consensus about national goals and identity, as well as rely on stable institutions. They argue that the world has changed in ways that make the concept of Grand Strategy useless for American foreign policy: first, the multipolar configuration of the international systems restrains the United States' ability to advance policies through hard power; second, there is no longer a minimal domestic consensus about the role the United States should play in the world, weakening the international liberal order that guided American Grand Strategy since

the 1940s; and third, populism has created a decision-making environment that disregards the opinions of foreign policy experts and intelligence teams. In that sense, defining and following a Grand Strategy would not only be impossible but would actually be damaging to the United States' international strategy, as the current international system demands flexibility. Consequently,

> Grand strategy is dead. The radical uncertainty of nonpolar global politics makes it less useful, even dangerous. Even if it were helpful in organizing the United States' response to global challenges today, an increasingly divided domestic polity has made it harder to implement a coherent and consistent grand strategy. Popular distrust of expertise has corroded sensible debate over historical lessons and prospective strategies. Populism has eviscerated the institutional checks and balances that keep strategy from swinging violently (Drezner; Krebs; Schweller, 2020, p. 116)

Klare (2018) also sees Trump's foreign policy as an adjustment to a different context in international politics. According to the author, the current international system is tripolar, as the United States, Russia, and China share the great-power table. In that context, Trump's strategy would not be one of abandoning U.S. international leadership, but an approach that tried to avoid the superfluous costs of engagement in the new order configuration.

This handful of scholars advancing different sets of arguments about Trump's grand strategic approach already leans us towards the notion that his foreign policy was not cohesive or coherent, and especially not easy to interpret through usual tools. Besides from those who try to define a Grand Strategy for the Trump administration and those who assert that the concept of Grand Strategy is no longer useful for understanding the United States' international strategy, there are also the scholars who claim that Trump had no Grand Strategy whatsoever. Lissner and Zenko (2020), for example, argue that the Trump administration was not able to build a Grand Strategy. According to them, the underlying logic of Trump's foreign policy was based on "short-term wins rather than longer-term strategic foresight; a "zero-sum" worldview where all gains are relative and reciprocity is absent; and a rejection of values-based policymaking", an approach labeled as tactical transactionalism.

Whether because of the impossibility of having a Grand Strategy in a changing international system and a complex domestic configuration, or because of the lack of guiding principles and the disengagement with the international liberal order, it is fair to assert that *the Trump administration did not have a clearly defined Grand Strategy*, and that is the relevant assertion for the purpose of this thesis. Although many analysts tried, is it not possible to

comprehensively define Trump's international strategy, neither define the core principles that guided his administration's foreign policy.

Besides from the concept of Grand Strategy, which is deeply related to a country's position in the international system, the concept of "foreign policy doctrine" is also frequently used by students of American foreign policy and could be helpful in the search for cohesion and coherence in Trump's foreign policy. Doctrines frame foreign policy positions and bring internal cohesion to an administration's international strategy, and can be defined as

> a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and opinions, exhibiting a recurring pattern, that competes deliberately as well as unintentionally over providing plans of action for public policy making, in an attempt to justify, explain, contest, or change the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community (Wright, 2015, p. 736).

Even though some presidents' doctrines are not as clearly defined as others, there is usually enough cohesion among an administration's international strategy to outline the core principles, ideas, and beliefs that guide foreign policy action. That is not the case of the Trump administration. During his four years in the White House, Trump did not manage to build a strategy cohesive enough to be called a doctrine. As Michael Anton asserts, Trump was

> not a neoconservative or a paleoconservative, neither a traditional realist nor a liberal internationalist, has caused endless confusion. The same goes for the fact that he has no inborn inclination to isolationism or interventionism, and he is not simply a dove or a hawk. His foreign policy doesn't easily fit into any of these categories, though it draws from all of them (Anton, 2019, p. 1)

This absence of an underlying framework led many scholars to argue that the "Trump Doctrine" could be defined as an "unpredictability doctrine", in which Trump purposefully sought to not define guidelines to the United States' international strategy, rendering his administration's decision-making more dynamic, leaving room for maneuver and course changes, and keeping both enemies and allies guessing (Krauthammer, 2017). This unpredictable approach was once mentioned by Trump during his presidential campaign, although social scientists and political commentators did not know if "unpredictability" would really be a core concept on Trump's foreign policy or if the concept was crafted by his foreign policy advisers as "a *post hoc* rationalization for a candidate prone to flipping over the board and swallowing the pieces" (Lerner, 2020, p. 2). After stressing the need for unpredictability in foreign affairs during his presidential campaign, the term faded away from Trump's

vocabulary, raising the question of whether "unpredictability" was simply a convenient label for the president's personal erratism (Lerner, 2020).

Bentley and David (2021) argue that Trump intentionally sought to develop an "unpredictability doctrine" through the analysis of four features that constitute unpredictability: inconstancy, inconsistency, unconstrainedness, and unreliability. For them, Trump was "predictably unpredictable" and mobilized the four mentioned features of unpredictability in many of his foreign policy decision-making processes. The authors also argue that explanations that do not account for Trump's unpredictability as a foreign policy doctrine do so because the usual interpretation of a what a "doctrine" means is deeply tied to the rational actor model and, as such, cannot comprehend Trump's erratic style and transactional approach (Bentley; David, 2021).

Daghrir (2020b) argues that the unpredictability in Trump's foreign policy is a product of Trump's personality. As a president with no prior political or military experience, Trump ran the presidency according to the characteristics that made him a successful businessman and entrepreneur: spontaneity, unpredictability, informality, improvisation, and many others. As such, Trump' foreign policy had no clear pattern and was prone to changes driven by Trump's impulsiveness and business-oriented style, leading to a foreign policy that is "chaotic yet pragmatic, impulsive yet functional, unpredictable yet realist" (Daghrir, 2020b, p. 5).

Hassan and Featherstone (2020) also make the argument that Trump's unpredictability cannot be considered a doctrine. They argue that, for "unpredictability" to be considered a doctrine, the concept should be consistently presented as a primary belief, fit into a more general belief system, describe the international system and/or America's role in it, be a shared policy paradigm by staff members, and should be extensively explained to the public. As Trump's "unpredictability" fails to meet any of these categories, Hassan and Featherstone claim that it should not be considered a doctrine, although it served an important political function in Trump's discourse as it was used to avoid accountability in foreign affairs (Hassan; Featherstone, 2020).

Another author that argues that Trump's unpredictability is not calculated is Wright (2019), who asserts that the president's foreign policy unpredictability was a result of clashes between Trump and the more "professionalized" national security establishment of the Republican Party. A similar argument is sustained by Larison (2019), who argues that

> There is no "Trump Doctrine" as such. There is a hodgepodge of competing influences and factions in the Trump administration, and depending on which ones happen to be ascendant on certain issues the capricious president will go

> this way or that without any pretense of consistency or overall strategy. The policy either ends up as a complete giveaway to the ideologues that obsess over a particular issue (e.g., almost anything related to Israel or Iran), or it becomes a confusing back-and-forth between opposing positions. So-called "principled realism" is as unprincipled as the president and as divorced from reality as the reality television character (Larison, 2019).

As a doctrine is defined as a recurring pattern of ideas, values, and beliefs, I argue that there is no such thing as an "unpredictability doctrine". As unpredictability is ontologically defined as the lack of recurring patterns, the concept does not serve the purpose of defining foreign policy guidelines or international strategies. Unpredictability is definitely a trait of Trump's foreign policy and one of his preferred decision-making methods, but methods define "how", while a doctrine should also define "what" and "why.

Even if unpredictability does not comprehensively explain Trump´s foreign policy, most of the literature reviewed in the last paragraphs share an important conclusion: Trump's foreign policy was inconsistent and incoherent, as it was deeply susceptible to his personal erraticism and unique personality. That is in line with the hypothesis to be tested in this thesis: the Trump administration's foreign policy was inconsistent and incoherent *because* of the Donald Trump's personal characteristics.

To summarize the discussions in this section, Daghrir (2020a) explains that

> the Trumpian world of uncertainty prevails through three major more or less contradictory perceptions: First, foreign affairs under the Trump administration are guided by a "Trump Doctrine" characterized by pragmatism, realism and an "America First" worldview. Second, as opposite to the first perception, American foreign policy under Trump is populist, inconsistent, ambiguous, confusing, and dangerous, thus, refuting the idea of a "Trump Doctrine." Third, the arena of international affairs is witnessing a decline of Pax Americana and is thereby shifting towards a post-American world. This final perception implies the end of American missionary exceptionalism. Thereafter, this perplexing American foreign policy presents itself as a subject worth researching on a variety of aspects. (Daghrir, 2020a, p. 3).

As such, it is possible to argue that *the Trump administration did not manage to build a coherent and cohesive Grand Strategy or foreign policy doctrine*. The 45th president of the United States clearly launched an attack on the foreign policy establishment that had been guiding American foreign policy for the last seven decades, challenging the core principles and institutions of the international liberal order, but failed to build a coherent and cohesive international strategy to substitute the one he dismantled. Regarding a doctrine, the closest analysts could get in defining a "Trump Doctrine" was to deem the president's unpredictability as a foreign policy framework, which reinforces the idea that Trump's foreign

policy was chaotic, incoherent and inconsistent, in line with the assumptions forwarded by this thesis.

1.2 Populism as a foreign policy strategy?

Populism is probably the most easily distinguishable pattern in Trump's foreign policy and has been highlighted by many analysts and political commentators. Before jumping into Trump's populism, it is important to define "populism", a term that has been increasingly used in different areas of the social sciences and in the field of International Relations. Because of its flexibility, definitions of populism can either be praised for their explanatory ability or criticized by their emptiness. Throughout the last decades, populism has been used to describe political movements with different features and in different regional, institutional, and economic contexts. Searching for a definition that is encompassing enough to capture different populist movements but also specific enough to differentiate between what is and what isn't populism has been a challenge for most scholars. The efforts to define populism generated different strands of research, which understand populism as either an ideology (Mudde, 2004; Mudde; Kaltwasser, 2014; 2018), a discourse (Laclau, 2005; Jagers; Walgrave, 2007; Aalberg et al., 2017), a political strategy (Weyland, 2001; 2017; 2021; Barr, 2019), or a political style (Moffitt; Tormey, 2014; Moffitt, 2016a; Moffitt, 2016b; Moffitt; Osteguy, 2021), among other research programs that have received less attention in the academic debate.

The ideational approach, widely used in the mainstream of research on populism, defines it as a

> thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people (Mudde, 2004, p. 543).

As a thin-centered ideology, populism is always attached to thick-centered ideologies, such as liberalism, socialism, or fascism. This means that populism can take very different shapes and display ideas from anywhere in the political spectrum. Although this definition might seem too encompassing, it can easily distinguish between populist and non-populist phenomena through an assessment of elitism and pluralism. Populism is always opposed to elitism, since it is grounded on a critique of the elites and an acclamation of the people, and it

is also opposed to pluralism, once it relies on a Manichean view of society, where the populist group is perceived as “good” and every opposing group is perceived as “bad” (Kaltwasser; Mudde, 2018; Mudde, 2004).

In the ideational approach, the core concepts of populism are the elites, the people and the general will. “The people” is an empty signifier that is constructed by the populist rhetoric and, as such, can adapt to different contexts and encompass different social groups. Although “the people” is a maneuverable concept, its construction is usually based on the idea that the people are sovereign and should be the ultimate source of political power, in opposition to the elites, who actually hold the political power. “The elites”, by their turn, are perceived as corrupt and working against the interests of “the people”. These elites can be represented by the political establishment, the media, the economic elites, the cultural elites, or even international groups: its form depends on the thick-ideology attached to populism and the particular context in which the populist movement arises. “The general will” links the populist movement to both the people and the elites: the populist leader claims to be the only true representative of the people’s interests (the general will), and the “corrupt elites” are portrayed as the establishment group that prevents the people from achieving their interests (Mudde; Kaltwasser, 2018).

Another very common definition of populism, especially among critical theorists, is the one that conceives it as a discourse. In this strand, populism is considered a communicational frame to connect with the people, appealing to them and pretending to speak in their name through an anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric. The populist discourse seeks to create identification between the populist leader and the people through the use of simpler language, the framing of problems in less conceptually complex ways, and flammable rhetoric to attack the establishment and political enemies (Jagers; Walgrave, 2007; Aalberg et al., 2017).

One of the most prominent names of this strand of populism research, Ernesto Laclau defined populism as a political practice that creates popular political identities through discourse. As such, populist discourse articulates popular demands by polarizing politics into two antagonistic groups: the people and the powerful elites. According to Laclau, populism is a form of radical democracy, in opposition to representative (liberal) democracy, which failed to include people’s demands into the political realm: populism represents the renaissance of politics and should be considered an emancipatory force (Laclau, 2004; 2005).

A third popular research line on populism defines it as a political strategy. In that approach, populism is understood as “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader

seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (Weyland, 2001, p. 14). In this approach, populism is seen as a type of political behavior and thus located in the realm of politics, rather than on the ideological or discursive realm (Barr, 2019). As a political strategy and, consequently, a type of political behavior, the populist leader becomes the central feature of populism, since political behavior is displayed by political actors. In that sense, populism displays three components: "a personal leader appeals to a heterogeneous mass of followers, the leader does so in a direct manner, and political organizing takes the form of personal vehicles with low levels of institutionalization" (Barr, 2019, p. 46). From this perspective, populism can be understood as an electoral strategy aimed at mobilizing voters through the figure of a charismatic leader and, as an electoral strategy, it would change as soon as the populist project wins power (Resnick, 2015).

By understanding populism as a political strategy, the focus of the definition lies on the forms and uses of populism, rather than on its content, as do ideational and discursive definitions. Populism is understood as a means towards an end: a direct interaction between a charismatic leader and a mass of followers to achieve political power through usually democratic means. This means that, for some scholars, the content of populist strategy is secondary to its definition, even though many of them recognize patterns of populist rhetoric, such as the anti-elite discourse (Barr, 2019; Weyland, 2021).

A more recent strand of research has been dealing with populism as a political style. The political style approach presents similar features to the political strategy strand, once both treat populism as a type of political behavior and put the populist leader on the center of the conceptual definition. As Moffitt and Tormey argue, a political style refers to "the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations" (Moffitt; Tormey, 2014, p. 387). There are many political styles, such as the authoritarian, technocratic, postrepresentative, and, of course, the populist style. For Hellstrom,

> Populism as style refers to a certain way of doing politics (...) The populist style typically relies on the charismatic leadership to partly bypass established ways of doing politics via e.g. party politics. Populist politics encourages direct channels for popular participation. The charismatic leader embodies the popular will in his or her persona. In this regard, the populist politician mobilizes voters along feelings of resentment, aiming to represent the common sense of the ordinary people vis-à-vis the political institutions and the established (indirect) ways of doing politics (Hellstrom, 2013, p. 9).

Moffitt and Tormey define the populist style as a combination of three features: an appeal to "the people", the mobilization of ideas of crisis and threat, and "bad manners". The appeal to "the people" is fundamental both because "the people" are the central audience of populism as well as the subject that populists intend to render present. Differently from most scholars following the ideational approach, "the people" here are not necessarily opposed to the "corrupt elites", and can be opposed to other societal groups, such as immigrants or ethnical minorities. Another central feature to this approach is the idea of crisis and threat: the elites or other societal groups are deemed as a source of crisis, corruption, or threat to "the people", that are, in their turn, being let down by the establishment. This crisis or threat situation demands radical and immediate political action, which can only be put forward by the populist leader, who favors short-term and fast political action in opposition to the establishment's "slow politics" (Moffitt; Tormey, 2014).

The third central feature of populism as a political style are the populist leader's bad manners. Those refer to

> amateurish and unprofessional political behavior that aims to maximize media attention and popular support. By disrespecting the dress code and language manners, populist actors are able to present themselves not only as different and novel, but also as courageous leaders who stand with "the people" in opposition to "the elite". (Mudde; Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 4).

Combined, these approaches provide a good overview on what populism means. As the approaches are not excluding, we should borrow insights from all of them and link them to Trump and his foreign policy, as the objective of this section is to advance the idea that Trump's foreign policy was influenced by his populism and that Trump, as a populist, had more agency and relevance in the decision-making processes than a non-populist leader would.

Following an ideational approach, Trump's populism creates an opposition between the American people and the "corrupt globalist elites", which opens the precedent for Trump to attack the core principles of the liberal international order, such as multilateralism, free-trade, and the defense of human rights. According to Lacatus, Trump's populist approach to foreign policy is not new to American politics, as it incorporates features of the Jacksonian populism, such as anti-elitism, a belief in American exceptionalism, strong nationalist ideas, and skepticism about the American ability to create and sustain a liberal order (Lacatus, 2021). This Jacksonian approach, which is also highlighted by Ettinger (2019) and Holland and Fermor (2021), was created through Trump's populist discourse and is structured around

the belief that the "government should do everything in its power to promote the well-being – political, moral, economic – of the folk community" (Mead, 1999/2000, p. 15). As such, Trump's Jacksonian populism served an important purpose on his administration's foreign policy, as he was able to build a collective identity for America that was opposed to the "corrupt globalist establishment" and an array of other foreign actors (Wojczewski, 2019), having practical implications on Trump's foreign policy towards multilateralism, migration, security, and trade (Jenne, 2021).

The rejection of universally applicable liberal internationalism is the factor that connects Trump's domestic slogan "Make America Great Again" and his foreign policy slogan "America First", in a movement that simultaneously creates internal cohesion among his followers and defines foreign policy agendas (Restad, 2020). This populist foreign policy is particularly clear in Trump's disengagement from international agreements, especially those related to trade: Trump's Jacksonian narrative was used to rationalize his withdrawal from international agreements, once his priority was to defend the interests and well-being of America's "virtuous" workers and farmers, who were victims of the globalist elites and foreign countries (Bacevich, 2017; Boucher; Thies, 2019). By combining poststructuralist IR theory and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Wojczewski (2019) convincingly argues that Trump's foreign policy was used to build a collective identity of the American people as "both nation and underdog", merging nationalist and populist sentiments, appealing to emotions such as hope, fear, nostalgia, and desire.

From a political strategic approach, Trump's foreign policy also clearly displays populist features, as it was remarkably direct, unmediated, and uninstitutionalized. Schneiker (2020) argues that this direct and uninstitutionalized approach is one of the fundamental characteristics of Trump's "populist superhero" identity, in which Trump posits himself as a superhero that needs to act with little to no constraints in order to solve America's problems. Internationally, these constraints are found in international organizations and agreements, where Trump has limited room for maneuver and, as such, chooses to disengage from or redesign these institutional frameworks.

> Regarding immigration, he, for example, relies on executive orders, such as those related to building a wall on the US–Mexico border, increasing the number of border patrol forces and immigration enforcement officers. According to Trump, all this has been done because of him and despite lacking support from Congress (White House, 2019b). "Like many populist leaders, Trump chafes at institutional constraints on his authority, and he projects the belief that he alone can embody the popular will ('I alone can fix it')" (Lieberman et al., 2019: 471). In February 2019, Trump "declared a

> national emergency" (Levine, 2019) to build a wall along the southern border after Congress refused to provide money for it. The following month, Congress passed a resolution that would have blocked the President from funding the wall without Congressional approval, but Trump vetoed this resolution and the House failed to override the veto (Zanona, 2019). Such unilateral action is considered as an expression of "Trump's mantra 'I alone can fix it'" (Collinson, 2019), a requirement of the populist superhero. Trump justifies such unilateral actions with his exceptional problem-solving capacity (Schneiker, 2020, p. 13).

This unconstrained approach to foreign affairs is also acknowledged by Drezner (2020), who asserts that Trump used the increasing array of formal and informal presidential powers – such as executive orders, executive agreements, states of emergency, national security directives, and many others – to push his foreign policies forward without the need for congressional approval or the validation of different governmental departments. Additionally, Trump frequently used social media platforms such as Twitter to communicate with followers and political leaders, announcing foreign policy guidelines, praising political allies, and offending and threatening opposing world leaders and countries, in a practice that became known as *Twitplomacy*. This uninstitutionalized approach to diplomatic communications was criticized by multiple relevant political actors and diplomatic entities (Šimunjak; Caliandro, 2019).

Regarding political style, Trump's populism and its role on his administration's foreign policy is also clearly observable. Besides from the appeal to the people, already discussed a few paragraphs ago, Trump's populist style is also displayed in the mobilization of ideas of crisis and threat and on his exhibition of "bad manners". Homolar and Scholz (2019) identified a "three-fold rhetorical strategy" in Trump's crisis-building discourse, which involved the declaration of a crisis, the identification of the agents generating this crisis, and the promise of a solution to the crisis if things are done as he says. According to Hall (2021), Trump's foreign policy rhetoric was largely directed at creating this sense of crisis among his supporters and, as such, assemble support for controversial foreign policy actions.

As to Trump's populist "bad manners", those are observed both in the president's uninstitutionalized way of carrying foreign policy and in his controversial comments towards other countries, cultures, and minority groups. As Hall, Goldstein and Ingram (2016) highlight:

> When Trump promises to tell the truth (Muslims are terrorists; some women are uglier than others; Mexicans are rapists), he aligns himself with opposition to political correctness, with a stance that rejects rhetorical caution regarding minority religions, genders, and ethnicities. Yet as entertainment, his gestures intensify the force of his words, attracting and holding the

> attention of the wider public as they dominate the news cycle (Hall; Goldstein; Ingram, 2016, p. 74).

His "bad manners" and challenging of the political correctness, as well as his rejection for the unwritten rules of diplomacy, serve the purpose of engaging his supporters and stigmatizing domestic and international groups that will further be portrayed as threats and motivate foreign policy actions (Schneiker, 2020).

As it is clear from the last paragraphs, populism seems to be a good explanation for Trump's behavior in foreign policy. Indeed, whether populism is being defined as an ideology, a strategy, discourse, or political style, Trump's rhetoric and behavior will frequently fit one of these populist categories, hence the numerous academic works defining Trump as a populist and linking his foreign policy to this definition. Still, populism alone does not define the content of any administration's foreign policy and, as such, populism does not provide cohesion or coherence to Trump's foreign policy. Although Trump's populist rhetoric created a national identity and designated international enemies, this ideological/discursive construction does not comprehensively explain the Trump administration's foreign policy. The populist behavior displayed by Trump also does not explain his foreign policy decisions, although it illustrates the method through which many decisions were made. In sum, populism can be considered a *political method*, providing leaders with ideological/discursive frameworks and guidelines for political behavior/performance.

Even though populism does not comprehensively explain Trump's foreign policy, it is an important and useful concept as it allow us to explore the relevance of Trump's personality in foreign policy decision-making processes. That is done through two argumentation lines: in populist settings, (i) the leader is more relevant to political processes and (ii) foreign policy decision-making processes are more centralized and personalized around the populist leader.

In all the mentioned strands of research on populism, the role of the populist leader is a relevant feature of populism, although this role is not always acknowledged as fundamental to define the concept. In the ideational approach, for example, the populist leader presents himself as the true representative of "the people" and, consequently, of the general will. Although scholars in this line of research highlight that, since populism is an ideology, it does not demand a leader, most populist movements throughout history are closely related to a strong and charismatic leadership (Mudde; Kaltwasser, 2014; 2018). For those who understand populism as a discourse, the leadership role is important: first, because the populist leader delivers the message, most of the time in direct and uninstitutionalized ways.

Nai (2020) even suggest that the source of the message is more important than the message's content in populist communications; second, because the populist leader's personal characteristics and life trajectory are usually incorporated to the populist message, creating a personal identification between the leader and the people, as opposed to the elites (Cañizales, 2013).

When turning to definitions of populism as a political behavior, the role of the populist leader becomes a defining feature of the concept. The focus on political behavior creates an ontological demand for accessing political actors, after all, there is no behavior without actors. In the political strategy approach, the populist leader is central to concept building, as populism is perceived as a strategy for personalist leaders to interact directly with the masses. In that sense,

> populism rests on personalistic leadership, seeks to boost its autonomy and power, and contests, pushes aside, or dominates other types of actors, such as elite factions and organized political parties. In particular, populist leaders combat the established "political class" and try to rise above it. Thus, the clear predominance of a powerful leader is a cornerstone of populism" (Weyland, 2017, p. 82).

If we understand populism as a political style, the role of the populist leader remains central to the definition of the concept: first, because of the ontological demand for an actor when analyzing political behavior, as it is with the political strategy approach; second, because the populist political style demands a direct and uninstitutionalized connection between the leader and the people and; third, because the performative aspect of populism as a political style (the display of bad manners, provocative language, unprofessional behavior) can only be performed by the populist leader (Moffitt; Tormey, 2014). In both the political strategy and the political style approaches, a populist leader is required: there can be no populism without a populist leadership.

1.2.1 Populism and foreign policy

Differently from the studies on populist leadership, the effects of populism on foreign policy are a fairly new research agenda, which is still developing in International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis. Studies tackling this issue began to flourish in the last five years, especially due to the elections of populist leaders in relevant countries, such as Trump in the United States. Within this recent trend, many scholars asked the question of what a populist foreign policy look like would. Verbeek and Zaslove (2017), for example, found that

it is very difficult to define a consistent foreign policy for populist parties, as the authors understand populism as a thin-ideology and foreign policy agendas are usually determined by the thick-ideologies adopted by each populist government. Analyzing European populists, Chryssogelos (2021) found that their foreign policy agendas are more conditioned to their respective countries' strategic cultures than by their populist features, as there is much heterogeneity among European populists and their foreign policies. Studying populism in Latin America, Wehner and Thies (2021) also forward the conclusion that there is more than one type of populist foreign policy, as the thick-ideologies of each administration are more determinant than populist features to a country's international strategy.

All of these attempts to capture a "populist foreign policy" fall short because, as it was argued earlier in this section, populism does not allow us to comprehensively understand foreign policy strategies. The substantial features of any country's foreign policy will be found through an assessment of its thick-ideology and the history of its strategic culture. As populism is better understood as a political method or framework, it could never comprehensively explain the substance of foreign policy strategies, but it is extremely useful in understanding decision-making processes within foreign policy. As Plagemann and Destradi (2019b) explain, "populism does not seem to have much of an immediate impact on the "substance" of foreign policy but that it certainly has important consequences for the "style" and the processes of foreign policy-making" (2019, p. 297).

After these assertions, studying the Trump administration's foreign policy becomes even more interesting: as discussed in the first section of this chapter, Trump's foreign policy cannot be understood through an assessment of American contemporary history and strategic culture, and is not comprehensively explained by any thick-ideology, as his foreign policy lacked guiding principles and was unpredictable, incoherent, and inconsistent. Whereas good explanations will not flourish from this "substantial" point of view, turning to Trump's populist "style" becomes even more critical to understand American foreign policy during his time in office.

Regarding the populist style in foreign policy, there are many relevant insights to be considered. Probably the most central insights come from Destradi and Plagemann (2019a), who assert that

> Centralization under populist leaders is not only more pronounced but also more personal. The anti-pluralist dimension of populism entails the claim that only the populist leader – and nobody else – can speak in the name of the 'true' people. As a consequence, the populist leader will be more personally involved in foreign policymaking (Destrad;, Plagemann, 2019a, p. 724).

This centralization and personalization of foreign affairs is derived from the intersection between populism's core features and the nature of foreign policy decision-making. While populism is anti-elitist, foreign policy is usually one of the most elitist domains within the political realm. In many countries, and particularly in the United States (Kurthen, 2020), foreign policy is usually conducted by unelected bureaucrats, less-relevant politicians and the academic community. This elitism is combined with the disinterest of many citizens regarding foreign policy issues, which increases the distance between foreign policy-making and "the people". As such, populism's anti-elitism and anti-pluralism, as populists claim to represent the "true people", fits perfectly within foreign policy, where populist leaders can easily advance the populist platform. The result of that combination is centralization and personalization of foreign policy issues under populist rule, as the populist leader will seek to conduct foreign policy by himself to counter the establishment's elitism and grant that the true people's interests are advanced in the international arena (Destradi; Plagemann, 2019a).

Another important insight from Destradi and Plagemann's research is that "populist leaders who are not bound by a strict 'thick' ideological frame, will have greater freedom to politicise foreign policy or to engage in shocking moves to impress a domestic audience" (Destradi; Plagemann, 2019a, p. 725). Conversely, "The impact of populists' centralisation and personalization (sic) of foreign policy decision-making is therefore mitigated by the strength and coherence of their thick ideology" (Destradi; Plagemann, 2019a, p. 726). The authors argue that unpredictability is a trend among the foreign policy of populist leaders, but only when these leaders' do not have coherent thick-ideologies, which is exactly the case of Donald Trump's international strategy.

In sum, it is fair to assert that, *because of its clear populist features, we could assume that the decision-making dynamics of Donald Trump's foreign policy were more centralized and influenced by his personal preferences, and the combination of these dynamics and the absence of a clear thick-ideology rendered Trump's foreign policy more unpredictable, as decisions were highly influenced by his personal characteristics.* As it is widely argued in the literature regarding the relevance of leader's personal characteristics to foreign policy decision-making, the centralization of decisions within a predominant leader's hands enhances the relevance of his personality in decision-making processes. More than that, the populist features in Trump's foreign policy also point us towards this assertion as the personalization of foreign policy decision-making is a characteristic of populism.

Still relying on contributions by Destradi and Plagemann, an important argument is that

> Once populists form governments, the bureaucracy may remain in place, but we can expect it to be marginalised. The route to the populist leader's ear will likely go less through standardised channels of communication and more through personal or family bonds, or party affiliation. Populist leaders can be expected to work with small groups of advisors, most likely not recruited from traditional foreign policy elites. At the same time, populist leaders may be induced to trust more in their personal relations with other world leaders, rather than in other formalised ways of bilateral communication, from ambassadors to line ministries' contacts. (Destradi; Plagemann, 2019, p. 724).

To corroborate the assertions that Trump's foreign policy was centralized and personalized, a closer analysis of the decision-making processes within the Trump administration is necessary. The next section is dedicated to this analysis, discussing the roles of the executive power and the foreign policy bureaucracies in United States' foreign policy and exploring the decision-making dynamics of the Trump administration, as well as exploring the influence of his personal characteristics in these decision-making processes.

1.3 Decision-making dynamics in Trump's personalized foreign policy

Of all the differences that the Trump administration brought about to American foreign policy, changes in the decision-making dynamics within the White House are among the most discernable. In his process of disrupting the establishment's foreign policy consensus, Trump disregarded the importance of the intelligence community and the foreign policy bureaucracy, centralized decision-making mechanisms, and changed the pace of American international action. Combined to Trump's measures, there is the already executive-driven structure of United States' foreign policy, which allows the executive branch to act despite Congressional constraints.

The nature of the international systems demands more fast-paced and centralized processes regarding international action, which justifies the Executive's predominance in foreign policy decision-making. As Peterson argues:

> Since foreign policy questions often require fast action, they are more appropriate for executive than legislative decision making. Presidents have vast formal powers to commit resources in foreign affairs, and they have far greater ability than anyone else to obtain information on developments abroad (Peterson, 1994, p. 226).

In the United States, specifically, foreign policy decision-making is highly centralized within the Executive branch. For the most part of U.S contemporary history, politicians from both the Democratic and Republican parties would argue that politics should stop at the water's edge, meaning that domestic political disagreements should not be carried to international politics, so that the country could cohesively face international threats and challenges. But, from the 1970's on, partisan divisions on foreign policy issues became not only more frequent but also a feature of each party's identity (Jentleson, 2010; Peterson, 1994). The partisanship of U.S foreign policy boosted the centralization of foreign policy decision-making in the White House, since governability became a problem. The relationship between the White House and the Capitol on foreign policy matters hasn't been necessarily antagonistic, and depends on which party controls the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as on the topics being discussed. Historically, this relationship has followed four patterns, as explained by Jentleson (2010):

> cooperation, when Congress has either concurred with or deferred to the president and a largely common, coordinated policy has been pursued; constructive compromise, when the two branches have bridged conflicts and come to a policy that proved better than either's original position; institutional competition, in which the conflicts have been less over the substance of policy than over institutional prerogatives and the balance between the need for executive accountability and congressional oversight; and confrontation, in which the policy positions have been in substantial conflict and Pennsylvania Avenue diplomacy has shown its greatest tensions (Jentleson, 2010, p. 29).

Although centralization in foreign policy decision-making is justified, the American presidency is often accused of abusing its autonomy in the international realm. Although these accusations are not always legally grounded, some decision-making processes are engineered to avoid Congressional participation, such as executive orders, executive agreements, presidential memorandums, national security guidelines, and state of emergency declarations. Even if these decision-making tools do not violate legal dispositions, some of them are usually considered a transgression of the "non-written rules" of the Pennsylvania Avenue diplomacy (Drezner, 2020; Jentleson, 2010; Kellner, 2018).

Whereas this centralizing trend did not start in the Trump presidency, the 45th president of the United States surely contributed to its deepening (Goldgeier; Saunders, 2018; Hacker; Pierson, 2019). To understand this trend towards centralization in the foreign policy decision-making within the Trump administration, it is important to explore his relationship

with the intelligence community and the foreign policy bureaucracy and his relationship with close advisors and core cabinet members.

Regarding the Trump administration's approach to the intelligence community and the foreign policy bureaucracy, Ashbee and Hurst (2020, p. 9) provide a good summary:

> Trump has taken a similar approach to parts of the foreign policy bureaucracy in Washington DC, with the Department of State (DOS) bearing the brunt. Trump's first Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, implemented a budget cut of one-third, cancelled the incoming intake of foreign service officers and oversaw the departure of sixty percent of the Department's most senior diplomats in his first year in office (Bergmann, 2017; Corrigan, 2018) […] The cumulative effect of these actions has been to "systematically accelerate[d] the decline of the State Department's capacity to perform its traditional role representing the United States to foreign nations" (Pfiffner, 2018, p. 161). The intelligence community (IC) has been the next most prominent target, with Trump ignoring or belittling the IC when it has failed to produce intelligence that conforms to his own prejudices. When the IC's 2019 Worldwide Threat Assessment drew conclusions about North Korea, Iran and climate change at odds with his own, Trump responded by declaring that the "Intelligence people" were "passive and naive" and that "perhaps they should go back to school!" (Rohde, 2019). This open criticism of the IC, combined with the actions taken against FBI Director James Comey and former CIA Director John Brennan, suggest that Trump is engaged in a systematic and "deliberate effort to diminish the IC's institutional credibility" (Sipher & Haas, 2019; see also Slick, 2018).

More than a deliberate effort to reduce the influence of these bureaucracies in the foreign policy decision-making processes, these layoffs were also motivated by critics to Trump's policies. In the first week of his administration, Trump fired a series of career ambassadors because of their critics to his Muslim travel-ban. When asked about the layoffs, Trump answered: "I'm the only one that matters, because when it comes to it, that's what the policy is going to be" (Trump, 2017).

Concerning Trump's relationship with advisors and cabinet member, Cottam (2021) divides the Trump administration in three phases. The first phase – and the most chaotic – encompasses the first six months of the administration, when General Michael Flynn, who campaigned for Trump during his candidacy, was the National Security Advisor, Rex Tillerson was the Secretary of State, and General James Mattis was the Secretary of Defense. This phase inaugurated some patterns that would last through the entire Trump administration, such as uninstitutionalized decision-making processes, where decisions were made after dinner conversations instead of after deliberations within the National Security Council (Cottam, 2021), and the pattern of Trump's disinterest in detailed information, which was combined with his lack of knowledge and experience in foreign affairs (Drezner, 2020).

Flynn only lasted 24 days as National Security Advisor, when he was replaced by General H. R. McMaster, leading to the second phase of the Trump administration.

In the second phase, two antagonist foreign policy groups were formed: McMaster, Mattis, and Tillerson composed the group the represented the interests of the establishment, trying to convince Trump of the benefits of the international liberal order and of the traditional internationalist focus of American foreign policy. The other group, composed by players such as Steve Bannon and Jared Kushner (Trump's son-in-law), would constantly disagree with the internationalists and argue in favor of trade tariffs and the withdrawal from important international agreements. As Trump took side with the second group, he fired McMaster and Tillerson, and Mattis signed his own resignation (Cottam, 2021). After his layoff, Tillerson said that it was challenging "to work for a man who is pretty undisciplined, doesn't like to read, doesn't read briefing reports, doesn't like to get into the details of a lot of things, but rather just kind of says, 'This is what I believe'" (Tillerson, 2018).

For McMaster's place, Trump chose John Bolton, a far right hardliner who had served as George W. Bush's UN ambassador. For the post of Secretary of State, Trump chose former CIA Director Mike Pompeo, who was also a foreign policy hardliner and consistently agreed with Trump's perception of international affairs. For Mattis' position, Trump selected Patrick Shanahan, a former executive at Boeing. With this new foreign policy configuration, the third phase of the Trump administration's foreign policy began (Cottam, 2021). With loyalists on the most relevant positions within the NSC, Trump managed to advance many of his policies during this third phase, as his staff served the purpose of "enablers, reverse engineering policies and providing justifications for Trump's worst impulses" (Drezner, 2020, p. 396). After disagreements with Trump, Bolton was replaced by Robert O'Brien in September of 2019. Shanahan was replaced by Mark Esper in July of 2019.

The high turn-over rate of key officials in the Trump administration is also one of the factors that could help explaining the incoherence and inconsistency of U.S foreign policy during his term (Boys, 2020). As these officials are usually responsible for elaborating and conducting foreign policy strategies, the instability in office posts also leads to instability in foreign policy positions, especially when this officials were dismiss because of disagreements with the president. This also leads to a foreign policy that is more personalized according to Trump's preferences, as he would waive disagreeing staff members and replace them with enablers for his foreign policy impulses (Drezner, 2020).

As mentioned in the last section, we assumed that Trump's populist foreign policy was not only more centralized but also more personal. Of course, these two aspects are deeply

correlated, as decision-making centralization leads to a greater influence of the leader's personal preferences and characteristics in the decisions. But, in Trump's case, his personal characteristics seem to be even more relevant and impactful for his decision-making and, as such, his personality has been studied by dozens of foreign policy scholars, a literature that will be reviewed henceforward.

In one of the most relevant works within this literature, Drezner (2020) argues that Trump's psychological traits, such as his short attention span, quick temper, and poor impulse control, influenced his decision-making in many occasions. The president's short attention span has jeopardized his understanding of many foreign policy issues, as he is "not detail-oriented" and "profoundly impatient". Drezner argues that

> Trump's inability to sit still and focus damages the standing of the United States in two ways. First, his short attention span means he can miss nuanced shifts in another country's position on an issue. Second, his restlessness can often lead to violations of diplomatic protocol, which are viewed as a sign of disrespect by other foreign leaders. The problem is compounded by his knowledge deficits. Because he lacks basic background information, his policy briefings would, all else being equal, have to be longer than normal, thereby guaranteeing that Trump's attention will wander before receiving all the necessary information (Drezner, 2020, p. 389).

His quick temper has led to snap decisions such as the killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, and has clearly distorted the selection of information he received from his team, as staff members and the intelligence community would purposefully avoid presenting him with information that would contradict the president's public statements, to ensure that Trump would not get angry. Trump's poor impulse control also impacted American foreign policy in many circumstances, as he disdained any form of strategic planning. As Drezner asserts, many of Trump's high-profile decisions were made impulsively, such as his trade war with China and the withdrawal of forces from Syria (Drezner, 2020). As Trump himself puts it: "I don't think I have to prepare very much. It's about attitude, it's about willingness to get things done. So this isn't a question of preparation, it's a question of whether or not people want it to happen, and we'll know that very quickly" (Trump *apud* Crowley et al., 2018).

These psychological traits are also related to Trump's unwillingness to listen to staff members and specialists. Disagreements between Trump and foreign policy officials would result in continuing hostility and end up with the dismissal of the staff member (Ülgül, 2020). As Lamb and Neiheisel highlight:

> Trump makes vital policy choices without meaningful input from those who embrace very different points of view. Apparently, the president has no desire to seriously consider perspectives that directly conflict with his own, though he may occasionally listen to them. Instead, he exercises command by relying on his formal powers, including executive orders, in an effort to bypass the need to work with other political actors and institutions at the federal, state, and local levels. Trump rarely seems to employ persuasion and bargaining with members of Congress (Lamb; Neiheisel, 2020, p. 7)

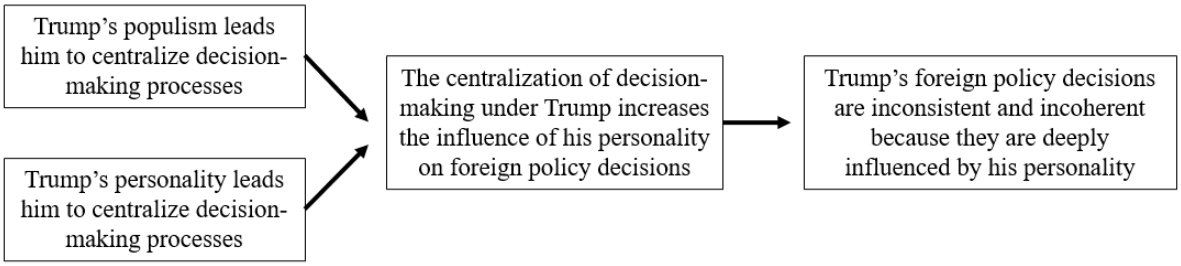
Another remarkable work regarding Trump's personality traits and their impact on his administration's decision-making dynamics is the book *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 37 psychiatrists and mental health experts assess a president*, organized by Lee (2019), where 37 psychiatrists and psychologists express opinions and diagnoses about Trump's psychological conditions – although making the disclaimer that is impossible to issue definitive diagnoses in this context. From all of the volume's contributions, it is important to highlight Malkin's (2019) analysis of Trump's narcissistic personality, which could lean the then-president towards paranoia, high distrust of others, volatile decision-making, and gaslighting. Sheehy's contribution (2019) is also very relevant, as the author assigns Trump's decision-making style to his trust deficit, which was developed throughout his life, especially because of his relationship with his tough father, and leads the president to prefer making decisions by himself and admiring authoritarian leaders. Also emphasizing Trump's highly narcissist personality, McAdams (2020) explains that many of Trump's decisions were deeply influenced by the president's need to bolster his narcissistic self-image, which led him to preside the country as "the episodic man", creating a fast-paced decision-making style where Trump would search for situations where he could "win" over any type of issue or policy.

As Cottam (2021) summarizes,

> Like every other president, Donald Trump's worldview and personality have influenced his approach to foreign policy decision making. But this administration has been chaotic in that decision making in large measure because of Trump's desire to be in control, his disinterest in opinion and facts contrary to his issue position, and the administrations limited effort to produce and follow process (Cottam, 2021, p. 150).

As such, *it is fair to assert that Trump's decision-making style was deeply influenced by his unique personality and led to the centralization of foreign policy decisions. As Trump dominated the decision-making dynamics within his administration, United States foreign policy decisions were profoundly sensitive to Trump's personality and personal preferences.* When complemented by assumptions from the other sections in this chapter, this assertion

about Trump's decision-making style allows us to close the chapter with the insightful connection presented below, which represents the core of this thesis' research design.



As we have established the argument that Donald Trump's personality influenced his foreign policy decisions, this thesis moves forward to test the hypothesis presented. The second chapter presents a brief literature review about the prominence of first-image studies in Foreign Policy Analysis, as well as a review of concepts and methods of personality studies, with a section dedicated exclusively to the Leadership Trait Analysis framework, which will guide this thesis' analysis.

2 STUDYING FOREIGN POLICY THROUGH LEADER PERSONALITY

The study of foreign policy, differently from the study of international politics, has always been centered around decision-making processes and its actors. This focus on decision-making dynamics led to an interest on the individuals making the decisions: their beliefs, personality traits, motivations, interests, and idiosyncrasies. As such, the subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis encompassed many individual-level approaches, either focusing on the contexts in which decisions were made, the cognitive dimensions of decision-making, the group dynamics regarding important decisions, the role of individual leaders on those processes, and the bureaucratic structure behind the decisions.

Conversely, the role of individual leaders on political processes has always been addressed by political scientists and theorists. This importance placed on the role of individuals led to the creation of the field of Political Psychology, which originated different theories and models of individual assessment, informing many theoretical frameworks across the social sciences, including Foreign Policy Analysis. Among these psychological assessments of political leaders, the ones addressing the personality of important individuals became especially relevant. Either through psychobiographies, cognitive approaches, or personality profiling, scholars assessed the beliefs, motivations, and psychological traits of relevant politicians, relating these psychological characteristics to policy processes.

This chapter is dedicated to an overview of this robust field of knowledge, providing this thesis with the conceptual and methodological tools to understand Donald Trump's personality traits and, afterwards, relate them to his foreign policy. In the first section of this chapter, I briefly review the interactions between Political Psychology and subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis, highlighting FPA's focus on the decision-making dynamics and the actors involved in these dynamics, as well as provide a brief overview of personality studies, emphasizing the different research agendas within the assessment of political leaders. In the second section, I introduce the Leadership Trait Analysis framework – which should guide this thesis' analysis – presenting its conceptual tools, core assumptions, and relevant contributions.

2.1 Foreign Policy Analysis and personality assessments

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is the subfield of International Relations (IR) that is dedicated to "the study of the conduct and practice of relations between different actors, primarily states, in the international system" (Alden; Aran, 2017, p. 3). Differently from theories of International Relations, which seek to explain the behavior of states through an assessment of the international system and its dynamics, foreign policy analysts search for answers regarding a state's behavior on its internal composition, as foreign policies are products of governmental action (Waltz, 1996). The subfield of FPA was born in the 1950's, in a context where the field of IR was going through important changes. After World War II, the realist theories that dominated the mainstream of IR could not convincingly explain a series of foreign policy events, which did not necessarily match the theoretical expectations drawn from the international system dynamics of the Cold War period. In that context, Foreign Policy Analysis was developed as a research program that sought to explain those foreign policy movements by assessing the domestic and individual-level dynamics of state action (Jervis, 1994; Hudson, 2014; Mendes, 2007; Figueira, 2011).

FPA scholars believed that a more careful investigation about the decision-making processes could provide more insightful analyses about a country's foreign policy. Following that logic, an assessment of the actors involved in the foreign policy decisions, their motivations, the bureaucratic structures, and social contexts under which the decision were made could help explain foreign policy movements that systemic analyses could not predict (Alden; Aran, 2017; Mendes, 2007). FPA's emphasis on domestic and individual-level dynamics expresses the subfield's core assumptions about the grounds of IR. The ground of a discipline denotes its conceptualization of the fundamental level at which phenomena occurs, expressing its ontological assumptions. As Hudson argues (2005, p. 1), International Relations as a discipline is grounded in "human decision makers acting singly or in groups". However, that does not seem to be the case with many theories of IR, which tend to give the impression that its ground lies in states, or in decision-makers understood as rational actors and, therefore, equivalent to the state, in an approach that is commonly referred to as the "billiard ball model" or as "black-boxing" the state (Hudson, 2005, 2014).

Thus, Foreign Policy Analysis emerged as an agent-oriented subfield rather than a structure-oriented one, as compared to mainstream theories of International Relations. This agent-oriented approach is deeply rooted in the very idea of studying foreign policy: as foreign policies are products of governmental action, structural theories of IR are usually not

specific enough to explain specific decisions. More often than not, the explanation for foreign policy decisions comes from the internal composition of states, a layer that theories of international politics do not seek to engage with (Waltz, 1996). As Walker posits (2011, p. 6):

> Foreign Policy Analysis as an agent-centered, micropolitical study of decisions by leaders; is usually subordinated to IR as a structure-oriented, macropolitical study of interactions in regional or global international systems. It is possible and even desirable to focus on the interactions of states as actors to analyze large-scale, long-term, historical trends and shifts in world politics. However, it is also appropriate to focus on individuals and small groups as actors within states and analyze the small-scale, short-term behaviors that produce patterns of continuity and change in larger political systems. It is particularly the case in foreign policy making, as so many major decisions affecting global politics are made by a small number of individuals (Walker, 2011, p. 6).

In sum, FPA was designed to open the black-box of the state, focusing on the processes of foreign policy formulation and decision-making, rather than on foreign policy results (Alden; Aran, 2017; Hudson, 2014). In 1954, highly influenced by psychoanalytic theories (Rapport, 2017), Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin published *Decision-Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics*, a book that became FPA's first seminal work. The authors understood decision-making as an organizational behavior determined by the positions of the actors involved, their communication, access to information, and motivations. As such, explanation for foreign policy decisions would be found at the individual level of analysis and possibly be multicausal, since the decision-making processes involved various features. By addressing the specificities of the decision-making processes, the authors managed to open the black-box of foreign policy decisions and achieve a more holistic understanding of the processes (Snyder; Bruck; Sapin, 1954).

Following that line of work, Harold and Margaret Sprout (1956) also suggested that any understanding of foreign policy outcomes that did not take the decision-making processes into account would be misguided. As such, to explain foreign policy decisions, analysts should understand the *psycho-millieu* of the actors making those decisions. The *psycho-millieu* describes the decision-makers' perceptions of the contextual environment in which the decisions are made. Therefore, understanding the individual actors' interpretations of the international system and the operational domestic environment would help analysts address the sources of foreign policy decisions (Sprout; Sprout, 1956).

These seminal works shaped a very methodologically plural strand of research within FPA, drawing on concepts and theoretical contributions from different disciplines on the social sciences, especially those departed from psychology. Instead of searching for a general

theory of foreign policy – as other research programs did, such as the Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis program established by Rosenau (1966) – this research program focused on middle-range analyses, addressing important features of the decision-making processes, such as the role of leaders and the cognitive dimensions of decision-making (De Rivera, 1968; George, 1969, 1980; Bonham; Shapiro, 1971; Holsti, 1976; Jervis, 1976; Cottam, 1977; Hermann, 1970, 1978, 1980).

This effort was important because it challenged assumptions related to rational choice theory, which dominated the state-centric mainstream of IR.

> Rational choice theory as applied to international affairs has sought to introduce a more rigorous, methodologically sound approach that could use the basic laws of choice to assess the process and outcome of foreign policy decision making. From this perspective, the maximization of utility by actors – in this case states – is the ultimate aim of foreign policy decision makers. By maximization of utility, we mean that a state first identifies and prioritizes foreign policy goals; it then identifies and selects from the means available to it which fulfil its aims with the least cost. […] the focus of this approach traditionally is on policy outcomes and therefore assumes a relatively undifferentiated decision-making body for foreign policy (a 'unitary actor') rather than one composed of different decision makers (Alden; Aran, 2017, p. 21-22).

These rational choice approaches present several shortcomings to the study of foreign policy processes. First, it is ontologically originated from the billiard-ball model, which assumes the state to be a homogenous entity. Individual and group perspectives are not taken into consideration: every decision-maker involved in foreign policy processes shares the same *rationale*, determined by a cost-benefit analysis regarding a state's position. Also, rational choice theories treat decision-makers as generic and interchangeable utility-maximizers, homogenizing beliefs, perceptions, individual traits, and idiosyncrasies (Holsti, 1976; Hafner-Burton et al., 2017). By positing that every decision-maker thinks and acts in a strictly rational way, rational choice theories assume the cognitive and psychological dimensions of these decision-makers, although these assumptions are drawn from incorrect presuppositions about human decision-making processes (McDermott, 2004; Goldgeier; Tetlock, 2001; Kertzer; Tingley, 2018; Holsti, 1976; Jervis, 1976).

Many research agendas emerged from this effort to understand leaders in order to understand foreign policy decision-making processes. Among these, the research agenda on leaders' personalities has paid important contributions to help us understand the idiosyncrasies of political leaders and their effects on decision-making processes. In broad terms, personality can be defined as the "habitual and distinct patterns of physical and mental

activity that distinguish one individual from another" (Caprara; Vecchione, 2013, p. 23), or as "a collection of relatively persistent individual differences that transcend specific situations and contribute to the observed stability of attitudes and behavior (Huddy; Sears; Levy, 2013, p. 8). In a more detailed fashion, personality can be defined as

> a complex pattern of deeply embedded psychological characteristics that are largely nonconscious and not easily altered, expressing themselves automatically in almost every facet of functioning. Intrinsic and pervasive, these traits emerge from a complicated matrix of biological dispositions and experiential learnings, and ultimately comprise the individual's distinctive pattern of perceiving, feeling, thinking, coping, and behaving (Millon, 1996, p. 4).

As such, the concept of personality is useful in understanding the psychological structures and processes that mediate the relationship between individuals and the environment in which they are inserted (Caprara; Vecchione, 2013). Therefore, individual personalities are a fundamental part of politics, once political events are mediated through the personality of the actors involved (Barenbaum; Winter, 2008). Understanding that leaders' personalities were relevant to policy processes led to the establishment of an entire subfield of studies directed at personality. Different strands of research emerged from personality studies, although their developments were not linear nor isolated. Research traditions within personality studies share core assumptions and methods, but can be distinguished through time frames, core concepts, and methods.

Early analyses within personality studies were dominated by psychobiographical research, addressing political leaders' life histories through psychological concepts, especially those drawn from psychoanalytic theory, as psychobiographies often searched for the unconscious motivations for a leader's political actions. To explain these political actions, psychobiographers would usually try to build an overall profile of the leader's personality, either in an attempt to provide more general explanations about his political decisions or in an effort to explain "certain puzzling "facts" of patterns that cannot easily be explained (or explained fully) by ordinary explanations such as rational self-interest, the logic of the situation, or social roles and expectations" (Winter, 2003, p. 26). As in any other form of political psychological analysis directed at understanding political leaders, the assumption underlying any type of psychobiography is that the personal characteristics of an individual make a difference in explaining his/her political behavior, affecting political outcomes in "some definitive, if not determinate ways" (McDermott, 2004).

The first decades of psychobiographical analyses were highly influenced by psychoanalytic theory, prioritizing the assessment of leaders' childhood experiences in order to explain their adult behavior and consequent political decisions. This prominent attention devoted to childhood experiences was later contested within psychoanalytic theory which, in turn, led to its contestation within psychobiographical studies. In that sense, Erik Erikson's (1959) contribution was fundamental, as the Neo-Freudian theorist argued that psychological development did not stop in the individual's childhood and sexual development should not be prioritized over other types of social development. Erikson argued that there were eight stages of human developed, spread across the individual's entire life, and each of these stages presented the individual with a conflict to be resolved; if not settled, the individual would be fixated with this conflict, acquiring psychological traits that would affect decision-making throughout the individual's life (Erikson, 1959).

Through the following decades, psychobiographical studies became more methodologically rigorous and were detached from psychoanalytic theory, as there was severe and widespread criticism about the psychoanalytic attempts to establish causal explanations of adult behavior relying on childhood experiences. The path forward for psychobiographical studies was that of "coherent whole explanations which seek to identify underlying themes that unify the diverse facts of individual lives" (Tetlock; Crosby; Crosby, 1981, p. 191). To achieve these coherent whole explanations, the scholars should search for the subject's integrated patters of behavior, outlining personal characteristics that were consistent over time, across different situations, and focusing on adult behavior – although childhood experiences should not be neglected. With these mapped out characteristics, scholars should mobilize theories that would help them interpret the collected evidence, later relating the subject's personality traits to his/her political behavior (Tetlock; Crosby; Crosby, 1981).

According to Greenstein (1969), there are two main steps when building a psychobiography: the first is to determine what is to be explained – the leader's entire political career? A specific political decision or context? The leader's political beliefs? –; after identifying the phenomenology, the second step is to build a psychological explanation for it, utilizing psychological concepts to hypothesize about the referred phenomenon. In addition to that, many psychobiographers also attempt to trace the origins of the leader's psychological characteristics, examining childhood and adult life experiences that could have contributed to the development of the leader's personality traits (Greenstein, 1969).

From psychobiographical studies, which sough to understand leaders through specific aspects of their lives, scholars shifted their efforts to finding psychological patterns of

behavior among these political leaders, assuming that leaders' personalities would fall into a range of categorizations that were distinguishable and provided patterns for the study of political decision-making. Post (2014) was one of these scholars, categorizing leaders into three categories of personality: narcissist, obsessive-compulsive, and paranoid. One of the most important frameworks in this regard is found in Barber's *The Presidential Character* (1972), where the author developed a categorization framework for political leaders using two axis: active-passive and positive-negative. The first axis regards the leader's sense that his personal efforts affect the world, while the second axis encompasses the leader's motivation for seeking office and his/her overall worldview, tackling personal dimensions such as optimism/pessimism, trust/suspicion, as well as his psychological needs regarding the presidential job. According to Barber, an evaluation of these two axes – which are shaped long before the president is elected – could provide important insights and forecasts into what kind of president the leader in question would be. This evaluation should take into account the leader's background and the most relevant episodes of his political career (Barber, 1972).

Another very popular strand of research within personality studies sought to assess the cognitive dimensions of leaders to understand their personalities. This cognitive approach

> assumes a complex, and realistic, psychology about human reasoning and decisionmaking. It does not assume individual awareness, open-mindedness, and adaptability relative to an "objective" environment, but assumes individuals are likely to view their environment differently and operate within their own "psychological environment" (Rosati, 2000, p. 50).

Understanding leaders' "psychological environment" is only achievable through an assessment of their cognitive processes. As with any individual, political leaders process information through cognitive shortcuts, as the human mind receives more information than it is able to process and filters which information is more relevant and deserves detailed processing. In sum, the human mind performs a series of cognitive processes in an attempt to simplify reality. These processes alter the individual's perception of events, actor, and situations in several ways, varying from individual to individual according to their life history, beliefs, and preferences. Memory-related processes, biases, cognitive limitations, and stereotypes generally distort the decision-making process, moving it away from the supposed rationality that rational choice theories find accessible and predominant (Jervis, 1976, 1989, 1994; Kahneman; Slovic; Tversky, 1982).

Within the universe of cognition, many useful concepts – such as "beliefs" – have been developed to help scholars understand and organize the human mind. Beliefs can be

defined as “subjective representations of reality” (Tetlock, 1998, p. 876). Although this is an overly simplified definition, it helps us in capturing the wide scope that the concept covers. Regarding its nature, beliefs encompass both internal processes and the external reality, as individuals have beliefs about themselves, their abilities, their goals, etc.; but also have beliefs regarding the world that surrounds them. Beliefs can be stimulating, shaping individual behavior and the behavior of those around the individual, as these beliefs are shared. It is also important to acknowledge that most beliefs have a strong bias towards commitment and faith, even when religions are not involved. Because of that, beliefs are deeply important to the believer and, as such, it is important for the believer that others accept his/her beliefs (Jervis, 2017).

Because of the nature of beliefs, individuals do not only choose their beliefs to understand the world, but also to cope with social and psychological needs that arise from social interactions (Smith; Burner; White, 1965). This idea speaks to Laswell’s (1930) assumption that founded the field of Political Psychology, in which political leaders projected their internal conflicts onto the political realm (Laswell, 1930). In politics, beliefs reflect reality as leaders interpret it, acting as psychological constraints or drivers of action, causing leaders to change their behavior in relation to political agendas and objectives (Walker, Schafer, 2006). As beliefs shape leaders’ perceptions and have influence over political decision-making,

> cognitive theories allow for the possibility that beliefs have an exogenous role. That is, they can and often do operate as causal mechanisms independently of the realities that they are assumed to mirror in other theories. Instead of passively reflecting reality, they steer the decisions of leaders by shaping the leaders’ perceptions of reality, acting as mechanisms of cognitive and motivated bias that distort, block, and recast incoming information from the environment (Walker; Schafer, 2006, p. 5).

Although cognitive theory highlights the exogenous role of beliefs, these beliefs are understood to be more relevant under certain circumstances, such as situations where information is scarce, ambiguous, or uncertain. Beliefs are also understood to act as exogenous causal mechanism when leaders are presented with information that contradict their beliefs: as beliefs are resistant to change, leaders tend to belittle information that does not fit their worldview, selectively searching for information that will corroborate their already established beliefs (Larson, 1994; Keohane; Goldstein, 1993; Hudson, 2014; Walker; Schafer, 2006; Jervis, 1976; Holsti, 1976). Decision-makers are usually influenced by their beliefs through many parts of the decision-making processes, such as when calculating cost-

benefit options and searching for courses of action. The influence of beliefs usually leads to biased decision-making behavior, pointing the leader towards paths that do not necessarily reflect reality (Simon, 1985; Holsti, 1976; Jervis, 1976).

As the study of beliefs gained prominence amongst the social sciences, the concept of "belief systems" was developed to allow for the organization and systematization of leaders' beliefs. A belief system can be defined as the individual's "complete universe of beliefs about the physical world, the social world and the self" (Rokeach, 1968, p. 123). What makes a belief system a system is the idea that the beliefs are interrelated and interdependent at some level (Larson, 1994). One of the most popular methods to access individuals' belief systems is through the construction of their operational codes. Operation Code Analysis was born from the psycho-cultural framework present by Nathan Leites in 1953, in which Leites combined aspects of the Russian culture to a psychological analysis of Lenin, creating an operational code about the beliefs of the soviet leader (Leites, 1953). Years later, the concept of operational code gained renewed relevance through the work of Alexander George (1969), who created a framework for assessing leaders' operational codes through an assessment of their philosophical and instrumental beliefs about the political world (George, 1969).

Another important concept that is closely tied to leaders' beliefs are their motivations. The study of leader's motivations is far older than its applications to political psychology. Motivation was intrinsically related to personality in many of Freud's writings, in which he argued that all human behavior was motivated either by life instincts (self-preservation, libido) or death instincts (self-destruction, aggressiveness) (Freud, 1910, 1916, 1917). Gordon Allport, who interpreted Freud's conceptualizations as excessively psychoanalytic because of its emphasis on libido and childhood origins, developed the notion of "functional autonomy" of motivations, in which he stated that adult motivations are not tangled with such primitive impulses as Freud posited (Allport, 1937). Allport's understanding was not widely accepted in the subfield of personality studies, but many of the contemporary research is based on the idea that motives arise from factors other than those Freud proposed (Barembaum; Winter, 2008).

A turning point on the studies of motivations was Murray's catalog of needs (1938), in which he listed twenty behavior-driving motivations that would be later better operationalized by David McClelland (1961,1992), who merged all these motivations into three more general needs (power, achievement, and affiliation) and managed to build a bridge between psychology and different fields in the social sciences using thematic apperceptive measures. It is important to state that motives supply direction and energy for action, unlike other

personality traits, that reflect leadership style and patterns of interactions with others (Winter, 2003). As in the words of Winter,

> Motives influence how leaders construe the leadership role; they sensitize perceptions of opportunity and danger; they affect the accessibility of different styles and skills; and they determine sources of leadership satisfaction, stress, frustration, and vulnerability (Winter, 2003, p. 153).

The need for power motive indicates an individual's concern with his or her reputation, prestige, and influence over other people. It indicates that an individual urges to have impact on a group of people, a country or even the world at large. Leaders who score highly on the power motive tend to make themselves visible to others, are narcissists, good organizers and tend to be successful managers. In small groups, those leaders thrive and are able to influence the other members. When lacking self-control and a sense of responsibility and altruism, power-motivated leaders are vulnerable to flattery and ingratiation, tend to improve only after success, not learning from their mistakes, and give relatively little attention to moral considerations when making political decisions. They also are risk-prone, tend to be verbally and physically aggressive and are considered impulsive (Winter, 2003, 2018; Semenova; Winter, 2020; Winter; Carlson, 1988). Power motivation is usually related with historians' ratings of greatness, arousal of polarizing emotions (power-motivated leaders are usually loved by their followers and hated by opponents), and involvement in armed conflicts (Winter, 1987).

The need for achievement expresses an individual's concern with doing things better and surpassing the standards of excellence. It indicates high aspirations and realistic calculations to achieve them, with performance modifications based on previous results. Leaders who score high on motivation tend to be successful economically, innovative, and good at calculating risks. In their search for methods that lead them to their goals, achievement-motivated leaders are prone to use illegal means and ignore established procedures and institutional rules, if they feel it is necessary. Those leaders excel in business careers, but usually do not adapt well to the political bureaucratic structure because it constrains their control of procedures (Winter, 2003, 2018; Semenova; Winter, 2020; Winter; Carlson, 1988).

The need for affiliation indicates an individual's concern with establishing and maintaining positive affective relations with others. It indicates high altruism and an urge to help others. Affiliation-motivated people tend to be friendly with others, but only as long as

they feel safe: when dealing with people who contradict their beliefs or disagree with them, affiliation-motivated leaders can be prickly and defensive. Because of that, those leaders usually take more advice from friends or close political allies than from experts and bureaucrats. This proximity with likely-minded people usually drives affiliation-motivated leaders to develop networks of social support. High affiliation scores are related with concluding arms-limitation treaties and major political scandals (Winter, 2003, 2018; Semenova; Winter, 2020; Winter; Carlson, 1988).

Besides from beliefs and motivations, which are within the realm of cognition and, as such, act as internal processes to the individual, another important concept for the study of personality is that of traits. While cognition allows us to understand how a leader sees the world and the self, personality traits allow us to understand the patterns of behavior that leaders have when interacting with other political actors. Often called "leadership traits", these characteristics are important for a comprehensive understanding of a leader's personality. Amongst many frameworks for the assessment of leadership traits, one of the most academically relevant is the Leadership Trait Analysis framework, which is reviewed in the next section.

2.2 Leadership Trait Analysis

Drawing from the literature's different focuses on personality, Margaret Hermann (1980, 1999, 2003) developed one of the most well-encompassing models of personality assessment, gathering nearly every relevant contribution to the study of personality traits in a single framework. Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis framework seeks to answer three main questions:

> (i) How do leaders react to political constraints in their environment—do they respect or challenge such constraints? (ii) How open are leaders to incoming information—do they selectively use information or are they open to information directing their response? (iii) What are the leaders' reasons for seeking their positions—are they driven by an internal focus of attention within themselves or by the relationships that can be formed with salient constituents? (Hermann, 2003, p. 195).

The answers to these questions are drawn from combinations of seven leadership traits: belief in ability to control events, conceptual complexity, distrust of others, in-group bias, need for power, self-confidence, and task-orientation. The association of these traits captures an individual's leadership style, which denotes "the ways in which leaders relate to

those around them – whether constituents, advisers, or other leaders – and how they structure interactions and the norms, rules, and principles they use to guide such interactions" (Hermann, 2003, p. 194).

To answer the question about how leaders react to political constraints, we need to assess leaders' belief in their ability to control events and their need for power. The belief in ability to control events indicates a leader's perception of his own control and influence over political events and the political environment in general. Leaders who score high in this trait will engage more actively in policy-making processes, seeking to centralize and maintain control over decisions, hardly delegating important tasks to subordinates. As they believe in their influence to shape events, these leaders usually prefer face-to-face interactions and are less prone to compromise on negotiations (Hermann, 1999, 2003). Individuals who score high in this trait believe in their ability to personality deal with political problems and, as this belief is not necessarily representative of reality, those leaders are prone to overreach (Dyson, 2006). Leaders with low scores on their belief in ability to control events tend to be more reactive than proactive, waiting for political developments before making decisions. Sometimes, their fear of failure results in bad political timing. These leaders are more prone to delegating tasks, especially if there is a probability of failure, so that they can shift the blame when events go wrong and accuse others of making it difficult for them to act (Hermann, 1999, 2003).

A need for power represents an individual's concern with his or her own reputation, prestige, and influence over other people. It indicates that the leader urges to have impact on a group of people, a country or even the world at large. Leaders who score highly on the power motive tend to make themselves visible to others, are narcissists and manipulate scenarios to always appear as winners. In small groups, those leaders thrive and influence the other members. When lacking self-control and a sense of responsibility and altruism, power-motivated leaders are vulnerable to flattery and ingratiation, tend to improve only after success, not learning from their mistakes, and give relatively little attention to moral considerations when making political decisions. They are also risk-prone, tend to be verbally aggressive and are considered impulsive. Leaders high in need for power would rather negotiate relevant matters in person, since they are skillful in direct interactions and good with manipulating people and situations. Conversely, leaders who score lower than average on their need for power have no problems delegating authority and empowering others. They have a strong sense of justice and are willing to sacrifice for the good of the group or the

country (Winter, 1987, 2003, 2018; Semenova; Winter, 2020; Winter; Carlson, 1988; Hermann, 1999, 2003).

As summarized in Table 1, leaders who score high in their belief that they can control events have been found to challenge the constraints of the political environment they are part of. If that high belief that they can control events is combined with a high need for power, the leader will be more skillful in his direct and indirect influence towards his objectives. If that high belief that they can control events is paired with a low need for power, the leader will challenge constraints more openly, not having the ability to exert influence and manipulate people and scenarios to reach the desired goals. Leaders who score low on their belief that they can control events but high in their need for power will also challenge constraints, but in more indirect manners. Leaders who score low on both their need for power and belief in ability to control events will respect constraints, valuing compromise and consensus building among their political allies and adversaries (Hermann, 2003).

Table 1 – Leaders' reactions to constraints

	Belief Can Control Events	
Need for Power	**Low**	**High**
Low	**Respect** constraints; work within such parameters toward goals; compromise and consensus building important.	**Challenge** constraints but less successful in doing so because too direct and open in use of power; less able to read how to manipulate people and setting behind the scenes to have desired influence.
High	**Challenge** constraints but more comfortable doing so in an indirect fashion—behind the scenes; good at being "power behind the throne" where they can pull strings but are less accountable for result.	**Challenge** constraints; are skillful in both direct and indirect influence; know what they want and take charge to see it happens,

From Hermann, 2003.

The question about leaders' openness to information is answered through the combination of their conceptual complexity and self-confidence. The conceptual complexity trait refers to the degree of differentiation a leader shows while describing or discussing policies, people, ideas, or places. Leaders who score high on conceptual complexity define matters in more complex ways, understanding the possibility that there are different reasons for a problem, as well as different solutions. They are interested in contextual information and would rather gather as much information as possible before making a decision, even if that

information goes against their policy preferences. Conceptually complex leaders take more time to make decisions and show flexibility to change. Conversely, the conceptually simple individuals tend to define matters in good-bad, black-white dichotomies, hardly acknowledging ambiguity in situations, which leads to political inflexibility. Conceptually simple leaders usually make decisions based on intuition, rather than using their time to plan and search for more information. For those leaders, information is processed according to stereotypes, which renders the world highly ordered and structured (Hermann, 1999, 2003; Dyson, 2009).

Leaders' score on self-confidence expresses their own "sense of self-importance, an individual's image of his or her ability to cope adequately with objects and persons in the environment" (Hermann, 2003, p. 212). For leaders who score high on self-confidence, contextual information is interpreted through their sense of self, which leads to inflexibility in decision-making as information is filtered and reinterpreted to fit the leader's sense of self-worth. Consistency in behavior is very important to those leaders, since they have a well-defined image of themselves. Leaders with low scores on self-confidence are usually more vulnerable to contextual changes, new information and to the opinions of other political players and the media. The ill-developed sense of who they are generally leads to highly inconsistent behavior, as changes in the political environment trigger changes in the leader's perception of his/her own interests and preferences (Hermann, 1999, 2003).

As Table 2 summarizes, leaders whose conceptual complexity is higher than their self-confidence tend to be open to information, being more pragmatic and responsive to the environment in the search for their political objectives. Oppositely, leaders whose scores on self-confidence are higher than their scores on conceptual complexity are understood as closed to information, being more insensitive to information from the environment and more driven by ideologies or principles. If leaders score relatively high on both these traits, they are also understood as open to information, combining the self-knowledge of what they want to achieve and the ability to receive cues from the environment, resulting in an opportunistic behavior. If leaders score low on both their self-confidence and conceptual complexity, they are found to be closed to information, presenting the tendency to accept the view of their closest advisory circle and locking into the position that seems more promising, with little room for course changes.

Table 2 – Leaders' openness to information

Scores on Conceptual Complexity and Self-Confidence	Openness to Contextual Information
Conceptual Complexity > Self-Confidence	Open
Self-Confidence > Conceptual Complexity	Closed
Conceptual Complexity and Self-Confidence Both High	Open
Conceptual Complexity and Self-Confidence Both Low	Closed

From Hermann, 2003.

The third question, about leaders' motivations for seeking office, is solely answered by the task-orientation trait. The task-orientation trait points towards one of two task focuses: if the score is high, it indicates a problem-oriented style; if it is low, it indicates a relationship-oriented style. Relationship-oriented leaders are usually more sensitive to the political context and adapt better than the problem-oriented leaders, who are driven by a set of ideas, a cause, or a problem to be solved and, as such, have marked predispositions towards policymaking (Hermann et al., 2001). For relationship-oriented leaders, interpersonal and social skills are crucial, as well as image maintenance. For those leaders, persuasion and marketing are central to achieving what they want. They would rather focus on dealing with the feelings and needs of important players in the political environment than directing their actions towards problem-solving. For this type of leaders, the loyalty and commitment of staff members and partners is key, and the focus of attention is always on strengthening and empowering the group. Opposingly, problem-oriented leaders are more concerned with pushing policy agendas forward, aiming to solve problems even at the cost of group morale. The people involved in the decision-making process are not as relevant as the substance of the problem, and the focus is always on advancing policy agendas (Hermann, 1999, 2003).

Table 3 – Leaders' motivation for seeking office

Score on Task Focus	Motivation for Seeking Office
High	Problem
Moderate	Both problem and relationship depending on the context
Low	Relationship

From Hermann, 2003.

Complementary to leaders' motivations for seeking office is their motivation towards the world, which is obtained through the combination of leaders' distrust of others and in-group bias. The distrust of others trait indicates a leader's "general feeling of doubt, uneasiness, misgiving, and wariness about others – an inclination to suspect the motives and actions of others" (Hermann, 2003, p. 215). Leaders who score high in this trait are usually suspicious of the motivations of other political leaders, especially if those leaders are perceived as political opponents. A high distrust of others can even turn into paranoia, leading to distrust towards the leader's own cabinet members and political allies. Such leaders place a very high value in loyalty and tend to dismiss advisers who oppose their views or challenge their authority. Generally, distrust of others is accompanied by a zero-sum game perception of world affairs: when someone wins, someone loses, and the distrustful leader's avoidance of losing is a barrier to negotiating with others. Leaders who are not distrustful of others are usually more willing to cooperate and engage in negotiations (Hermann, 1999, 2003).

The in-group bias trait represents a worldview in which one's own group is perceived as the most important. Leaders who score high in this trait are interested in creating and maintaining a strong group identity, favoring the in-group in every decision made. In-group biased leaders tend to perceive the world in friends versus enemies logic, usually electing external scapegoats to blame for the group's problems and mobilize the population's support through this external threat. The group's achievements are overstated, and the group's weaknesses are rationalized away. Those leaders understand politics as a zero-sum game where, for a group to win, other groups must lose. Leaders who are not in-group biased are less prone to perceive the political world in we vs them, enemies vs friends terms. These leaders would rather engage in constructive interactions with the opposition and foreign groups, opting for positive diplomatic gestures and participation in multilateral summits (Hermann, 1999, 2003).

Table 4 provides a comprehensive explanation of the interactions between scores in distrust of others and in-group bias.

Table 4 – Motivation towards world

In-group Bias	Distrust of Others: **Low**	Distrust of Others: **High**
Low	World is not a threatening place; conflicts are perceived as context-specific and are reacted to on a case-by-case basis; leaders recognize that their country, like many others, has to deal with certain constraints that limit what one can do and call for flexibility of response; moreover, there are certain international arenas where cooperation with others is both possible and feasible. *(Focus is on taking advantage of opportunities and relationships)*	World is perceived as conflict-prone, but because other countries are viewed as having constraints on what they can do, some flexibility in response is possible; leaders, however, must vigilantly monitor developments in the international arena and prudently prepare to contain an adversary's actions while still pursuing their countries' interests. *(Focus is on taking advantage of opportunities and building relationships while remaining vigilant)*
High	While the international system is essentially a zero-sum game, leaders view that it is bounded by a specified set of international norms; even so, adversaries are perceived as inherently threatening and confrontation is viewed to be ongoing as leaders work to limit the threat and enhance their countries' capabilities and relative status. *(Focus is on dealing with threats and solving problems even though some situations nay appear to offer opportunities)*	International politics is centered around a set of adversaries that are viewed as "evil" and intent on spreading their ideology or extending their power at the expense of others; leaders perceive that they have a moral imperative to confront these adversaries; as a result, they are likely to take risks and to engage in highly aggressive and assertive behavior. *(Focus is on eliminating potential threats and problems)*

From Hermann, 2003.

Studies using the Leadership Trait Analysis framework have grown in the last decades, attesting the relevance and utility of the concepts and methods pioneered by Hermann. Researchers have convincingly applied the LTA framework to study the relationship between leaders' personality traits and decision-making processes in very different countries and contexts, attesting the framework's analytical ability and methodological efficiency. Although LTA has been primarily used to analyze foreign policy decisions, its concepts and methods can be applied to understand domestic policy processes and other political dynamics (Hermann, 1999, 2003; Hermann et al., 2001).

Studying Turkish leaders, Çuhudar et al. (2020) related the personality traits of those decision-makers to foreign policy decisions. In a more individually directed research, Gorener and Ucal (2011) addressed Erdogan's leadership traits and convincingly related them to his foreign policy doctrine. Brummer (2016) related the leadership traits of British prime-ministers to foreign policy fiascos. Dyson (2006) used the LTA framework to understand Tony Blair's decision to participate in the Iraq War alongside the United States. Van Esch and

Swinkels (2015) combined the personality traits of European leaders and the economic pressure their countries suffered to explain their responses to the Euro Crisis. Rohrer (2014) used the LTA framework to compare British prime-ministers' leadership traits and the perceived effectiveness of their tenure in office. Ribeiro and Burin (2021) applied LTA methods to test common assumptions about Dilma Rousseff's leadership style and its relationship with changes in Brazilian foreign policy during her term.

Besides from the complete profiles, separate psychological traits have also been used to understand policy processes and decisions. For example, Kesgin (2020) related Israeli prime-ministers' high distrust of others and low conceptual complexity to a more aggressive foreign policy. Keller and Foster (2012) related United States presidents' self-confidence and belief in ability to control events to the use of military force abroad. Dyson (2009) relied on Margaret Thatcher's cognitive complexity to explain her foreign policy.

Amongst the growing literature using the Leadership Trait Analysis framework to analyze foreign policies, Trump has been subject to scrutiny more than once. Thiers and Wehner (2022) used the LTA framework to assess the leadership styles of Donald Trump and Hugo Chávez, in an attempt to test whether or not it was possible to understand populist leaders' foreign policy behaviors through patterns in their personalities. Hypothesizing that a low task-orientation, a high in-group bias, and a high distrust of others could act as drivers of noncooperative and conflict-inducing behavior, the authors find that the only trait in which Trump and Chávez score outside the norming group average and in the same direction is their low task-orientation, which indicates a relationship-oriented personality. Although the paper only confirms one of the three hypotheses, it provides important insights into the link between personality and populism.

Walker, Schafer, and Smith (2018) combined Leadership Trait Analysis and Operational Code Analysis to compare the personalities of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, in an effort to predict how Trump – or Hillary, had she won the electoral pledge – would exercise power as president of the United States. Their research finds that Trump displayed high scores in his belief in his own ability to control events, need for power, and distrust of others, while scoring low in conceptual complexity, self-confidence, task focus, and staying within average on his in-group bias. Combined with an Operational Code Analysis and role theory extrapolations, the authors forecasted that Trump would be likely to prefer the role of a rival in international affairs, willing to turn partners into rivals or even enemies, but not willing to turn rivals into partners (Walker; Schafer; Smith, 2018).

Relying on the data presented in Walker, Schafer, and Smith (2018), Turner and Kaarbo (2021) used Leadership Trait Analysis, as well as three other methods of personality profiling, to assess Donald Trump's personality and analyze his unpredictable behavior towards China. They found that the most unpredictable part of Trump's approach to China was his rhetoric, highly influenced by his impulsivity, poor emotional control, and provocative tendency. While the content of Trump's rhetoric was indeed difficult to anticipate and, as such, unpredictable in many ways, Turner and Kaarbo assert that this unpredictability was grounded in Trump's personality, which makes him a "predictably unpredictable" leader. Besides from the important insights on the Trump administration's approach towards China, the piece also offers an important contribution for the purpose of this thesis, as it "links personality traits to inconsistent rhetoric" (Turner; Kaarbo, 2021, p. 15).

Acknowledging one of the few patterns to be found in Trump's foreign policy, Fitzsimmons (2020) used Leadership Trait Analysis to explain Trump's consistent hostility towards international agreements. Using data drawn from Berger, Wolf, and Wyss (2017), Fitzsimmons argues that Trump's high belief in his own ability to control events and high distrust of others, which makes him a challenger of constraints, motivated him to withdraw from a series of international agreements in different policy areas, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Iran Nuclear Deal (Fitzsimmons, 2020). Hassan and Featherstone (2020) used the concept of conceptual complexity to discuss Trump's alleged "unpredictability doctrine", in an article that was already mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. Although they build a convincing argument, they assume that Trump displays a low conceptual complexity without using LTA's scoring methods. The same approach is taken by Siniver and Featherstone (2020), who argue that Trump's supposed low conceptual complexity is grounded in a plutocratic worldview, using his approach to NATO as a case study.

In sum, the Leadership Trait Analysis framework provides well-established concepts and methods for the study of leaders' personalities in international politics. Through the last decade, studies using the LTA framework have been increasingly present in top-tier International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis journals, attesting its relevance and analytical depth. This thesis relies on this well-established framework to assess Trump's foreign policy, an effort that is not new to LTA scholarship, as it was shown in the last paragraphs. This thesis thus differentiates itself from other contributions regarding Trump's psychology in many aspects, such as the question it seeks to answer – what is the explanation for Trump's inconsistency and incoherence in foreign policy? –, the traits it chooses for

analysis – openness to information, reaction to constraints, and motivation for seeking office –, and the case it chooses for analysis – U.S approach towards North Korea. Additional reflections about the uses of the Leadership Trait Analysis framework will be provided in the final remarks of this thesis.

3 TRUMP'S PERSONALITY AND FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS: THE CASE OF NORTH KOREA

After arguing for the importance of studying Trump's foreign policy inconsistencies through his personal characteristics and discussing the conceptual and methodological tools to do so, the third chapter of this thesis is dedicated to analyzing the case of the Trump administration's foreign policy towards North Korea. United States diplomacy with North Korea during the Trump administration is probably the most iconic and distinguished foreign policy case to discuss the influence of Trump's personality in foreign policy decision-making processes. Throughout Trump's four years in office, his approach towards North Korea swung from threatening the Asian country with nuclear missiles and offending Kim Jon-Un through Twitter to becoming the first American president to meet in person with a North Korean leader and to step into North Korean soil. Although the meetings between Trump and Kim did not lead to the expected results and, as such, did not generate relevant foreign policy outcomes, American diplomacy towards North Korea provides us with key insights from the Trump administration's decision-making dynamics and the president's participation in these processes.

In order to analyze this foreign policy case through the lens of Political Psychology, I use the first section of this chapter to present the methods and theoretical assumptions of the Leadership Trait Analysis framework, as well as to present the data under analysis, drawn from Thiers and Wehner (2022). After the presentation of the data and the methodological tools involved, I explore the results of Trump's leadership traits, comparing his scores to those of 284 world leaders and establishing that he challenges constraints, is open to information, and is relationship-oriented. These three assertions about Trump's personality allow us to create hypothesis about his foreign policy behavior, drawing from Leadership Trait Analysis literature.

In the second section of this chapter, I outline United States' foreign policy towards North Korea during the Trump administration. This overview tackles both Trump's rhetoric towards North Korea and the concrete actions in the U.S-DPRK diplomacy, drawing on official information and on journalistic reports. The third section of the chapter is dedicated to analyzing American foreign policy towards North Korea through Donald Trump's personality, comparing his expected behavior – outlined in section 3.1 – to the actual behavior observed in his bilateral approach to the DPRK.

3.1 At-a-distance methods in psychological assessments

In the last chapter, I presented the conceptual tools within the Leadership Trait Analysis framework, as well as briefly reviewed the relevant literature. More than a robust conceptual model, the Leadership Trait Analysis also encompasses a well-defined and rigorous methodological setting. Each of the seven leadership traits presented in Hermann's framework can be assessed through at-a-distance automated content analyses. At-a-distance analysis became the most common method within Political Psychology because of the analysts' inability to assess the psychology of political leaders through conventional clinical methods. More than a feasible alternative to conventional psychological methods, some scholars even argue that at-a-distance analysis, when theoretically grounded and well-executed, are even more reliable than experimental or clinical analysis, as the object is assess in natural settings and, without the leader's direct participation, the risk of biased contributions from the object is inexistent (Schafer, 2014).

Quantitative at-a-distance analysis methods, such as the one used in this thesis, are usually done through the assessment of verbal behavior. This type of psychological assessment is based on the assumption that what is publicly said by a political leader reflects their personality traits (Hudson, 2014). Analyzing verbal behavior has many advantages in assessing a leader's personality, as highlighted by Schafer (2014):

> First, verbal behaviour is behaviour, and as such it has all the advantages of using almost any behaviour for psychological assessment, as discussed above: it is done by the subject; it is observable; it differs from the behaviour of others; and it tells something about the psychology of the subject. […] Second, verbal behaviour is a type of behaviour that is readily available for political psychology research: virtually all political actors engage in various forms of public speaking. Third, verbal behaviour is analysable: it is possible to analyse patterns of words, and, as a result, systematic content analysis can produce highly reliable measurements of specific psychological characteristics (Schafer, 2014, p. 238).

Among the many ways to analyze verbal behavior, one of the most popular is known as content analysis. Winter and Stewart define content analysis as "a technique for making psychological inferences about politically relevant aspects of the personality of political actors from the systematic, objective study of written and transcribed oral material" (Winter; Stewart, 1977, p. 29). For the content analysis to be measurable, it is usually based on the frequency in which some words appear on the leader's verbal behavior. The core assumption behind this is that "the more frequently leaders use certain words and phrases in their

interview responses, the more salient such content is to them" (Hermann, 2008, p. 156). From that assumption, a coding scheme is defined, where the frequency of some words, terms, and phrases allows do analyst to make assertions about a leader's personality (Hermann, 2008). The Leadership Trait Analysis coding scheme is presented in Table 5, as well as the conceptualization of each trait.

Table 5 – Trait conceptualization and coding scheme

Trait	**Description**	**Coding**
Belief in ability to control events	Perception of the world as an environment leader can influence. Leader's own state is perceived as an influential actor in the international system	Percentage of verbs used that reflect action or planning for action of the leader or relevant group
Conceptual complexity	Capability of discerning different dimensions of the environment when describing actors, places, ideas, and situations	Percentage of words related to high complexity (i.e., ''approximately,'' ''possibility,'' ''trend'') vs. low complexity (i.e., ''absolutely,'' ''certainly,'' ''irreversible'')
Distrust of others	Doubt about and wariness of others.	Percentage of nouns that indicate misgivings or suspicions that others intend harm toward speaker or speaker's group
In-group bias	Perception of one's group as holding a central role, accompanied with strong feelings of national identity and honor	Percentage of references to the group that are favorable (i.e., ''successful,'' ''prosperous,'' ''great''), show strength (i.e., ''powerful,'' ''capable'') or a need to maintain group identity (i.e., ''decide our own policies,'' ''defend our borders'').
Need for power	A concern with gaining, keeping and restoring power over others	Percentage of verbs that reflect actions of attack, advise, influence the behavior of others, concern with reputation
Self-confidence	Personal image of self-importance in terms of the ability to deal with the environment	Percentage of personal pronouns used such as ''my,'' ''myself,'' ''I,'' ''me,'' and ''mine,'' which show speaker perceives self as the instigator of an activity, an authority figure, or a recipient of a positive reward
Task orientation	Relative focus on problem solving versus maintenance of relationship to others. Higher score indicates greater problem focus	Percentage of words related to instrumental activities (i.e., ''accomplishment,'' ''plan,'' ''proposal'') versus concern for other's feelings and desires (i.e., ''collaboration,'' ''amnesty,'' ''appreciation'')

From Dyson, 2006.

In other types of psychological assessments, the documents analyzed can and should vary in nature and context. In Leadership Trait Analysis, though, as we wish to access the leaders' personality traits, the nature of the documents selected should match some patterns of spontaneity, to avoid the possibility of ghost-writing and pre-made answers. For that reason, speeches delivered at international and domestic forums, political rallies or in Congress should be avoided. To assure the spontaneity of the contents selected, the analysis should overtake only the leaders' interview responses to the media, as Hermann (1999, 2003) suggests should be done.

In the Leadership Trait Analysis framework, the verbal material selected for the content analysis should only encompass interview answers with at least 100 words should be selected for the analysis, to guarantee the stability of the answers. The volume of data should have the minimum of 50 excerpts of interview answers with at least 100 words each. To assure that the personality traits are more representative of the leaders, it is important to collect answers from different interviews across time – to account for possible changes in the leader's personal characteristics – and media outlets – to account for audience and interviewers' variations, which might make the leader more or less comfortable (Hermann, 1999, 2003; Hermann et al., 2001). Once the data is assembled, the content analysis process is done through an automatized software analysis provided by ProfilerPlus, a Social Science Automation software that codes and scores the texts into the seven personality traits, with scores ranging from 0 to 1 (Levine; Young, 2014).

Leaders are considered high or low in a given trait when they score higher or lower than one standard deviation from the comparison group average (Hermann, 1999, 2003). The comparison group can be a sample of world leaders, heads of state, or even the presidents of the same country, for more context specific comparisons. Scoring high or low on each trait indicates certain trends towards decision-making behavior. These trends are drawn both from theoretical assumptions and from the accumulative literature on personality traits, since many academic works have compared the leadership traits and political behaviors of different leaders throughout the last decades (Kaarbo, 1997; Kaarbo; Hermann, 1998; Dyson, 2006; 2009; Görener; Ucal, 2011; Keller; Foster, 2012; Van Esch; Swinkels, 2015; Çuhudar et al., 2020; Fitzsimmons, 2020). Combined, the trait scores allow us to understand an individual's leadership style, which accounts for the leader's personality through the answer of Hermann's (2003) three guiding questions: is the leader open or closed to information?; how does the leader react to constraints?; and is the leader motivated by problems or relationships?

Having obtained the answers to these questions from the combinations of trait scores, the analyst is able to hypothesize about a leader's decision-making behavior, as the literature on leadership styles outlines tendencies for foreign policy decision-making behavior according to the leader's personality. In this thesis, the decision-making trends drawn from Trump's leadership style will allow us to generate hypotheses about his foreign policy behavior, later to be compared with his actual decision-making behavior in the case of U.S foreign policy towards North Korea. By comparing the hypothesized behavior, drawn from Trump's leadership style to his actual foreign policy behavior, I should be able to test whether or not it is possible to assert that Trump's personality acted as a causal mechanism in his foreign policy decision-making towards North Korea.

In Political Psychology, causal mechanisms are understood as "processes operating inside the individual and connecting environment and outcomes" (Walker; Post, 2003, p. 63). Differently from structural theorists within International Relations, who would probably assume that causal mechanisms are models of rational choice or are not autonomous in their effects, scholars that study decision-making processes drawing contributions from Political Psychology have long acknowledged that

> these mechanisms are not rational processes endogenous to structural conditions and may have an important autonomous impact on decisions and outcomes. Assessing the conditions under which "personality" as a causal mechanism becomes more important is necessary to determine the fit between a structural theory and a particular case under analysis. At this point, the objective is precisely to determine whether the case in question conforms to the covering-law generalization from a structural theory about a universe of cases or deviates from it due to the operation of intervening causal mechanisms between structural conditions and decision outcomes (Walker; Post, 2003, p. 64).

Throughout the first chapter of this thesis, I have presented the conditions in which "personality as a causal mechanism" becomes more important, highlighting Trump's lack of consistency and coherence regarding his international strategy, his populist approach to foreign affairs, and the decision-making dynamics of his administration, as well as emphasizing the role of his personality in foreign policy decision-making processes. Although this thesis has no intention of validating or invalidating any specific structural theory, it is built around the clear unfit between Trump's foreign policy and any type of structural framework that could comprehensively explain it. As such, the analysis of the Trump administration's foreign policy towards North Korea should allow us to understand his personality as an autonomous causal mechanism impacting the president's decision-making.

It is important to acknowledge that I have no intention of claiming that Trump's personality was the *only* factor determining his foreign policy decisions.

3.1.1 Donald Trump's leadership style and expected foreign behavior

To establish Trump's leadership style and answer Hermann's (2003) guiding questions, we rely on data drawn from Thiers and Wehner's "*The Personality Traits of Populist Leaders and Their Foreign Policies: Hugo Chávez and Donald Trump*", published by the International Studies Quarterly in 2022. The authors gathered 1,073,473 words of spontaneous verbal material from Donald Trump's interviews and press conferences, analyzing 517 documents from January 2017 to January 2021 (Thiers; Wehner, 2022). The data was analyzed using the Profiler Plus software, and the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 – Donald Trump's leadership traits and a comparison group

Leadership Trait	284 World Leaders	St. dev	Donald Trump
Belief in ability to control events	0,35	0,05	0,380 (lean high)
Distrust of others	0,13	0,06	0,269 (high)
Task orientation	0,63	0,07	0,534 (low)
In-group bias	0,15	0,05	0,125 (average)
Self-confidence	0,36	0,10	0,496 (high)
Conceptual complexity	0,59	0,06	0,636 (lean high)
Need for power	0,26	0,05	0,252 (average)

From Thiers and Wehner, 2022.

Donald Trump's leadership traits are compared to a control group of 284 World Leaders, generating mean scores and standard deviations that allow us to assert that Trump scored above average, within average, or below average in each personality trait. Through these comparisons, we're able to assert that Trump scores above average in his distrust of others and self-confidence, leans high in his conceptual complexity and in his belief that he can control events, scores close to average in his need for power and in-group bias, and scores low in his task orientation.

As his belief in ability to control events is higher than average and his conceptual complexity is within average, Trump is understood as a leader who challenges constraints. As Hermann (2003) explains:

> Leaders who are high in the belief that they can control events but low [or within average] in the need for power will take charge of what happens and challenge constraints, but they will not do as well in reading how to manipulate the people and in working behind the scenes to have the desired influence. Such leaders will not be as successful in having an impact as those high in both traits. They will be too direct and open in their use of power, signaling others on how to react without really meaning to (Hermann, 2003, p. 200).

According to the literature, leaders who challenge constraints seek for control and influence over the environment and situations in which they find themselves, looking for ways to surpass environmental constraints in order to achieve their goals. These leaders are usually willing to engage with situations head-on, looking for quick solutions for the problems presented and dealing forcefully with these problems (Driver, 1977). These leaders work actively to bring decision-making dynamics within their control, so that they can command what will happen politically and look for ways to overcome constraints (Hermann; Preston, 1994; Hermann, 2003). As such, we would expect Trump to control and centralize foreign policy decision-making processes, engaging proactively and directly with important issues and overpassing institutional or political constraints.

As Trump scores high in self-confidence and above average on conceptual complexity, the 45th U.S president is understood as someone who is open to information. As Hermann (2003) outlines:

> If both [self-confidence and conceptual complexity] are high, leaders will be open and more strategic, focusing their attention on what is possible and feasible at any point in time. Their high self-confidence facilitates having patience in the situation and taking their time to see what will succeed. These leaders will combine the best qualities of both these characteristics—a sense of what they want to do but the capability to check the environment to see what will work. It is interesting to note that this type of leader is less likely to be elected in democratic systems, perhaps because their behavior seems to the outside observer and interested constituent to be erratic and opportunistic. If one knows the goals and political contexts of such leaders, their decisions and actions become more logical. Without this knowledge, however, they may seem indecisive and chameleonlike in their behavior (Hermann, 2003, p. 206).

Leaders who are open to information usually look for contextual cues in the environment, analyzing the political context in order to know what is feasible, which leads to more pragmatic decision-making behavior. These leaders tend to look for expert opinion before making decisions and to observe what other important political leaders are doing to deal with the issue at stake (Kaarbo; Hermann, 1998; Hermann, 2003). Drawing on these

assumptions, we would expect Trump's decision-making behavior in foreign policy to be pragmatic, looking for cues in the environment and asking for expert advice before making decisions. As he does not have strong pre-established beliefs, we would also expect his foreign policy to be erratic and prone to changes, according to new information from the environment.

Regarding his task-orientation, Trump is understood as a relationship-oriented leader, as he scores low on the trait. The literature on personality and leadership styles tells us that relationship-oriented leaders usually

> want to keep the morale and spirit of their groups high. These leaders are generally sensitive to what the people want and need and try to provide it. They will only move the group toward its goals as fast as the members are willing to move. Camaraderie, loyalty, and commitment to the group are critical for leaders with this emphasis. The people in the group, not what needs to be done, are the focus of attention. These leaders work to foster a sense of collegiality and of participation in their groups. Members have the feeling that they are a part of what happens and that their views are sought and listened to. For these leaders, mobilizing and empowering members are what leadership is all about. As a result, they are likely to build teams and to share leadership, often seeking out opinions about what is feasible among relevant constituencies at any point in time (Hermann, 2003, p. 212).

Relationship-oriented leaders expect certain feedbacks from the environment, whether it is acclaim, power, approval, acceptance, status, support, etc. They are usually more sensitive to the political context and adapt better than the problem-oriented leaders, who are driven by a set of ideas, a cause, or a problem to be solved and, as such, have marked predispositions towards policymaking (Hermann et al, 2001). Interpersonal and social skills are crucial for these types of leaders, as well as image maintenance. As such, persuasion and marketing are central to achieving what they want. They would rather focus on dealing with the feelings and needs of important players in the political environment than directing their actions towards problem-solving. For this type of leaders, the loyalty and commitment of staff members and partners is key, and the focus of attention is always on strengthening and empowering the group (Hermann, 1999, 2003). According to Trump's relationship-orientation, we would expect his foreign policy to be highly responsive to the political context and centered around building strong interpersonal relationships with other leaders, serving the purpose of group strengthening and maintenance (both internally and externally) while also creating and guaranteeing a public image of both Trump and the group through social skills and marketing.

Complementary to his motivation for seeking office, which indicates a relationship-oriented personality, we're also able to assess Trump's motivation towards the world, as he scores high on his distrust of others and scores within average on his in-group bias. Through these traits, Trump can be understood as a leader who perceives the world as conflict-prone, but also understands that other countries have constraints to their actions and, as such, relationships between countries are not necessarily conflictful. As such, leaders who score high in their distrust of others and moderately in their in-group bias focus on "taking advantage of opportunities and building relationships while remaining vigilant" (Hermann, 2003, p. 213). According to these assertions, we would expect Trump's decision-making behavior in foreign policy to be suspicious of other countries and leaders, but with the potential to turn foes into friends when able to build a strong relationship with these countries and leaders.

Combined, these personality features indicate that Trump has a *Directive* leadership style, which implies that his "focus of attention is on maintaining one's own and the government's status and acceptance by others by engaging in actions on the world stage that enhance the state's reputation" (Hermann, 2003, p. 198). As our hypothesis about Trump's foreign policy decision-making behavior are drawn, the next section is dedicated to an overview on the United States' diplomacy with North Korea during the Trump administration, highlighting the key events about the bilateral relationship and emphasizing Trump's role in them. Afterwards, in section 3.3, I match the hypothesizes drawn in this section and relate them to the events described on section 3.2, allowing us to test whether or not it is possible to understand Trump's personality as a causal mechanism in his foreign policy towards North Korea.

3.2 Diplomacy with North Korea during the Trump administration

The Trump administration's foreign policy towards North Korea is probably the issue where Trump's personality is more clearly relevant in the decision-making processes and, as such, it was selected as the case analysis in this thesis. Trump's approach to North Korea was extremely personal, both in the sense that it was centralized in Trump's hands and in the sense that the president himself got personally involved in it, especially through his interactions with Kim Jon Un. Throughout Trump's four years in office, his relationship with Kim Jon Un and North Korea went from threatening the country with "fire and fury" to exchanging "love letters" with Kim, in another aspect that well-encompasses Trump's foreign policy as a

whole: inconsistency and incoherence. This section is dedicated to providing an overview on American diplomacy towards North Korea during the Trump administration.

The Trump administration's approach to North Korea can be separated in two very different moments. The first one began in 2017, Trump's first year in office, and was marked by a "fire and fury" approach, in which Trump and Kim Jon-Un would constantly exchange threats. The first interactions were triggered by North Korea's ballistic missile launchings following Trump's inauguration, which were perceived by the United States' administration as a threat – if not objectively, symbolically. In the following months, Trump mentioned and threatened Kim Jon-Un and North Korea on several occasions via Twitter (Kuznar, 2021). In the beginning of July, North Korea tested an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) which could potentially hit the United States, if targeted to do so. This launching worried American officials and led to a National Security Council meeting that discussed options without the presence of Trump (Cottam, 2021). In the first year of the Trump administration, North Korea conducted 20 ballistic missile tests – more than twice it did during the first year of the Obama presidency (Cha; Katz, 2018).

In August 2017, Trump threatened North Korea with "fire and fury like the world has never seen" (Wolff, 2018), a phrase that well summarizes the first year of U.S-DPRK relations under Trump. In his first address to the United Nations' General Assembly, Trump threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea and called Kim Jon-Un the "Rocket Man", a taunt he would repeat many times. To his turn, Kim called Trump a "mentally deranged U.S dotard". In his New Year's Day address, Kim touted North Korea's nuclear readiness, leading Trump to tweet:

> North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the "Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times." Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works (Trump, 2018).

Those interactions were fueled by the Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign on North Korea, which consisted of imposing new unilateral economic sanctions on the Asian country and performing military exercises alongside South Korea in the peninsula (Sigal, 2020). Herbert, McCrisken, and Wroe (2020) named this maximum pressure campaign the "peace through strength" strategy, as the Trump administration tried to coerce North Korea into negotiating through the performance of military exercises alongside South Korea

and Japan and diplomatic pressure on China and other countries to impose sanctions on Kim's regime (Herbert; McCrisken; Wroe, 2020).

The second moment in the relationship between the two countries began in early 2018, when Moon Jae-In, the South Korean president by the time, decided to capitalize on what he perceived as a more cooperative tone from Kim's New Year's Day address. Moon reopened the inter-Korean dialogue channels and issued an invite with all expenses paid for the North Korean team to attend the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang (Cha; Katz, 2018). In that context, the United States and South Korea postponed military exercises until after the Winter Olympics, reportedly in an effort to reduce tensions between the Koreas on the wake of the sports event. The gesture was well received by the North Korean leader and marked a turning point on U.S-DPRK relations, that shifted from constant threats and taunts to a more friendly and constructive interaction. American and South Korean officials met with North Korean officials met multiple times, Kim visited Moon Jae-In, and Trump and Kim started to exchange letters with good intentions (Kuznar, 2021; Carlin, 2021).

On March 8, 2018, Trump accepted an invite to meet with Kim Jon-Un on what would be the first time ever a sitting United States' president met with a North Korean chairman. The meeting happened in Singapore, on June 12, and ended with positive – although vague – commitments from both sides. In a joint statement signed by both parts, Kim committed to the complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, while Trump committed to the building of a renewed, friendly relationship between the two countries, which would involve economic aid from the United States and the lifting of the sanctions imposed on North Korea. The United States also committed to build a lasting and stable peace in the Korean peninsula. Although promising, the meeting did not lead to practical measures that would allow for the expressed intentions to become policy processes, or any type of political roadmap (Cummings, 2020; Sigal, 2020; Magnotta, 2021; Cottam, 2021).

As Boys (2020) points out

> The meeting epitomized what Rucker and Leonnig (2020, 262) identified as the president's 'reality-show diplomacy… short on substance but heavy on superlatives'. The men shook hands, shared a meal, and signed a vaguely worded document in which Trump offered unspecific 'security guarantees' and North Korea committed to the similarly unspecific 'complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula,' using even vaguer language than in its past nuclear agreements with the United States (Boys, 2020, p. 16).

Day and Wedderburn (2022) interpret the summit between Trump and Kim in Singapore through the category of "foreign policy performance", highlighting the theatricality

of Trump's diplomacy towards North Korea and using wrestling argot to explain the Singapore summit. Through this framework, Day and Wedderburn argue that Trump's feud with Kim started in his election campaign, when the then-Republican candidate said that he would have no problems in meeting with Kim. When in office, Trump's maximum pressure campaign on North Korea served the purpose of "setting the stage" for a meeting, creating a narrative for the upcoming meeting that, even though didn't render relevant commitments, allowed Trump "both to claim authority to his audience at home and burnish his dealmaking credentials" (Day; Wedderburn, 2022). After the Singapore meeting, Trump declared via Twitter: "There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea" (Trump, 2018).

From that point on, although generally positive, the U.S-DPRK relationship went through diplomatic highs and lows. After the Singapore meeting was scheduled, North Korea had unilaterally stopped testing missiles; after the meeting, the United States announced it would suspend its military exercises with South Korea. But as the United States resumed military exercises alongside the South Koreans, three months after the suspension, North Korea resumed missile tests and started sending mixed signals to the American negotiators (Sigal, 2020).

> North Korean gestures of goodwill begin to fray late in 2018. On November 15, North Korea tested, under the watchful eye of Kim Jong-Un, an "ultramodern tactical weapon." While this did not apparently violate any agreements, the test was a threat to South Korea, perhaps signaling North Korean impatience with U.S. demands. In Kim Jong-un's 2019 New Year's speech, he pledged to meet President Trump and not to make nuclear weapons (Kuznar, 2021, p. 260).

Amid these diplomatic mixed signals, Trump and Kim met again in the end of February 2019, in Hanoi. Despite the success of the Singapore meeting, the meeting in Hanoi failed to reach any significant agreements and, indeed, led to a backlash on the relationship between the countries. By the end of the meeting, Trump and the United States' negotiators insisted on North Korea's complete denuclearization as a first step towards the normalization of the countries' relationship but was not willing to give Kim and North Korea anything meaningful in return. The DPRK's negotiators demanded the relief of key UN sanctions as a guarantee before the beginning of the denuclearization process, a measure the U.S was unwilling to take (Sigal, 2020). Chaudoin Milner, and Tingley (2021, p. 16) assert that the Trump administration aimed "unreasonably high" and that Kim Jon Un made "unacceptably high demands", leading to a deadlock in negotiations. Another point that jeopardized the negotiations was the United States' unwillingness to discuss the peacebuilding process in the

Korean peninsula, once the focus of the meeting turned almost completely to the matter of denuclearization (Carlin, 2021).

In May 2019, Kim resumed ballistic missiles tests, which Trump dismissed as a serious threat. Although the negotiations were cold, Trump and Kim's personal relationship seemed to be going well, with numerous letters exchanged expressing their mutual admiration. Woodward (2020), who had access to the letters, states that the DPRK's Chairman wrote that "the personal ties (between him and Trump) are not hostile like the relations between the two countries, and we still maintain excellent relations, as to be able to exchange letters asking about health anytime if we want". Trump, in his turn, wrote to Kim "You are my friend and always will be". Trump also declared to the press: "(Kim) wrote me beautiful letters and we fell in love" (Carlin, 2021).

At this point, there were no real expectations regarding a diplomatic agreement for the denuclearization of North Korea. In spite of that, Trump and Kim met for a third time, in the Korean Demilitarized Zone, where Trump became the first U.S president to step into North Korean territory. Besides from an historical moment that yielded innumerous op-ed photos, the meeting did not change the frozen status of the negotiations. Many authors, such as Dian (2018), argue that Trump was outplayed by Kim, who managed to gain international leverage and legitimacy:

> in terms of "relative gains", North Korea has gained more than the United States in the bargaining process. In particular, Pyongyang has obtained a boost in its internal and international legitimacy, the suspension of US-led military exercises on the peninsula, and the possibility of driving a wedge in the US-South Korean alliance, in exchange for a very vague commitment to work toward the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula (Dian, 2018, p. 1).

Kelly and Derr (2021) argue that North Korea missed a historically unprecedented opportunity, failing to capitalize on a political window of "two overlapping dovish presidents governing its primary geopolitical opponents" (Kelly; Derr, p. 23), as both United States' president Donald Trump and South Korean president Moon Jae-in were willing to negotiate. They assert that Kim Jon Un made no serious concession during the negotiations, which led to disengagement from the other parts (Kelly; Derr, 2021).

In sum, American foreign policy towards North Korea went through two very distinct phases, from the threat of nuclear war to an unprecedent cooperative engagement. The diplomacy between the two countries was highly personalized in the relationship between Trump and Kim, who went from exchanging insults and threats to becoming, in the words of

Trump, “good friends”. Although the diplomacy between the two countries generated high expectations of a deal to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, Trump’s engagement with North Korea ended with nothing more than lots of op-ed photos and a new friend. In the next section, we explore the relationship between Trump’s leadership style (outlined in section 3.1) and his decision-making towards North Korea, establishing the link between his personality and his foreign policy decisions.

3.3 Trump’s leadership traits and U.S diplomacy with North Korea: As personal as it gets

After a delineation of Trump’s leadership style and a brief overview of his administration’s foreign policy towards North Korea, it is now time to establish the connection between his personality and his approach to North Korea and Kim Jon-Un. To reach that goal, we will evaluate whether the behavioral hypotheses drawn from Trump’s leadership style in section 3.1 are sustained in the case of North Korea, comparing the expected behavior to the actual events and decision-making dynamics. As official documents on United States’ diplomacy with North Korea are scarce, evidence for that connection arises from scholarly, journalistic, and biographical works regarding the Trump administration’s foreign policy decision-making processes towards North Korea.

Trump as a leader that challenges constraints

In section 3.1, we hypothesized that Trump would control and centralize foreign policy decision-making processes, engaging proactively and directly with important issues and overpassing institutional or political constraints. In the case of U.S foreign policy towards North Korea, this hypothesis is definitely sustained.

Trump controlled the decision-making processes regarding foreign policy towards North Korea since the beginning of his presidency and, most of the time, did so through uninstitutionalized channels, challenging the constraints imposed by traditional diplomacy and the non-written rules of foreign affairs. The first good example of this approach is Trump’s use of the social media platform Twitter, that was used as a political tool throughout his time in the White House. In North Korea’s case, Trump used Twitter to offend and threaten Kim Jon-Un and his regime multiple times in 2017, as well as to call for Chinese support in solving the Korean crisis. From 2018 on, Trump used Twitter to praise the North Korea leader, as well as to announce decisions and advancements in the bilateral relationship

between the countries. More than that, John Bolton (2020) asserts that Trump's tweets were often discouraged by top-level cabinet members, such as Mattis, Tillerson, and Bolton himself, evidencing Trump's "go-alone" approach to North Korea. According to Woodward (2020), Mattis strongly advised Trump against tweeting threats to North Korea in 2017, warning about the danger of the rhetorical escalation, only to be ignored by Trump. Also through Twitter, Trump undermined his top diplomat's credibility when he wrote that Tillerson was "wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man" (quoted in Woodward, 2020, p. 109).

This uninstitutionalized and direct approach to foreign policy is also perceived on the way Trump dealt with the media. One of Trump's most infamous and impactful quotes regarding North Korea – when he stated that Kim's regime would be met with "fire and fury like the world has never seen" – was not issued through official diplomatic channels, but was made during a meeting with media coverage. Many other important statements on U.S foreign policy towards North Korea – both threatening and cooperative in character – were made during interviews with the media or at political rallies. As Day and Wedderburn (2022) summarize:

> First, Trump would assiduously disrupt diplomatic norms with a total disregard for the heat these moves would generate from figures in the foreign policy establishment. Second, this disregard stemmed from Trump's vision of himself as both protagonist and hero of his own dramatic universe—a vision that informed his framing of any potential engagement with Kim as a highly personalized contest. […] Third, he would be entirely happy to conduct diplomacy through informal, unofficial channels, via promos cut at rallies or in the media (Day; Wedderburn, 2022, p. 8)

Trump's control of the foreign policy processes regarding North Korea is also evidenced by the nature of his summit diplomacy. As a leader who beliefs he can control events and "outplay" other leaders in negotiations, Trump sought for direct and unmediated access to Kim, hoping that his interpersonal skills would grant him a good deal. Trump's decision to meet with Kim Jon-Un for the first time was made without consulting any advisor and, as he disregarded any type of expert advice, the summits happened under little preparation by the American president, as in his own words: "I don't think I have to prepare very much. It's about attitude, it's about willingness to get things done. So this isn't a question of preparation, it's a question of whether or not people want it to happen, and we'll know that very quickly" (quoted in Crowley et al., 2018).

During his first meeting with Kim, Trump displayed yet another sign of his centralization of foreign policy processes when, without consulting his administration's officials, he mentioned the possibilities of withdrawing U.S troops from the Korean peninsula and cancelling military exercises alongside South Korea (Wolff, 2019; Woodward, 2020). When negotiations reached a stalemate after Kim and Trump's second summit, Trump reportedly sought for even more control over the negotiation processes, as he believed that "he alone could make a deal with his friend Kim Jon-Un" (Cottam, 2021, p. 149). This willingness to deal directly with the bilateral relations is also related to Trump's relationship-oriented trait, as will be discussed afterwards.

It is also important to highlight the role of populism in Trump's decision-making style. Populist communication is characterized, among other things, by a flammable rhetoric; populist behavior is based on the direct, uninstitutionalized, and unmediated exercise of government; and the populist style consists of the mobilization of ideas of crisis/threat and of "bad manners". All of these aspects are part of Trump's foreign policy towards North Korea and contribute to the understanding of Trump as a leader who challenges constraints.

Trump as a leader that is open to information

In section 3.1, we hypothesized that Trump would be pragmatic in his foreign policy, looking for cues in the environment and asking for expert advice before making decisions. We would also expect him to display a policy that is prone to changes according to new information from the environment. In the case of U.S foreign policy towards North Korea, this hypothesis is partially sustained.

Trump was definitely not the type of leader to search for expert advice, as it was exposed many times throughout this thesis (see section 1.3 for an extensive review). The information shared by John Bolton in his White House memoir (2020) and by the reports of Woodward (2020) and Wolff (2019) also corroborate this assertion. Specifically in the case of American diplomacy towards North Korea, Trump would frequently ignore expert advice and key officials within his administration had to make backstage moves to control the possible outcomes of Trump's rhetoric and actions (Bolton, 2020). What is even more striking about Trump's unwillingness to rely on expert advice is his lack of knowledge or experience on foreign policy and nuclear dissuasion topics. As Cha and Katz mention, the American president was "flying blind into meetings with Kim, acting on little more than his gut instincts, without the advice of experienced foreign policy and Asian affairs experts" (Cha; Katz, 2018, p. 91). Bolton (2020) disclosed that the briefings that the foreign policy staff

presented to Trump were carefully engineered to make the president come to the conclusions the staff wanted him to have, but making him feel like he came to the conclusions by himself.

Although Trump was not open to information from his advisers, he was clearly open to information from the environment, which led to many course changes in his pragmatic foreign policy. Trump did not hold strong pre-fixed beliefs about other leaders, countries, and events, and was prone to completely turn around his foreign policy decisions if cues from the environment indicated that there was a better possible path. That is exactly what happened in the beginning of 2018 when, after a year of exchanging threats with Kim, Trump decided to engage positively with the North Korea after some acts of good will from the country's Chairman, reverting his "maximum pressure" campaign into a "maximum engagement" one. Trump's flip-flops on foreign policy issues were not understood as a problem by his electorate, as McDonald, Croco, and Turitto (2019) show. As such, reversing foreign policy decisions did not constitute a problem for Trump domestically, as his supporters were willing to follow along with the president's order of the day.

As Cottam (2021) explains:

> Where Trump differs fundamentally from other presidents in terms of imagery is that he does not appear to bring the images into play when he engages in personal negotiations with the leaders. Explaining this would require an in-depth investigation into psychology which is not possible here, but it is notable that he is not hindered in negotiations by strong pre-existing images. For better or worse, he deals with leaders of other countries individually. […] His negotiations with Kim Jong-un are another clear example. After his threats and insults, he became the first American president to negotiate one-on-one with the North Korean leaders and afterwards announced that "we fell in love." (Cottam, 2021, p. 132-133).

When talking about North Korea, Trump himself has told Woodward (2019): "I like flexibility. Some people say I change. I do. I like flexibility, not somebody that has a policy and will go through a brick wall for that policy when you can change it very easily and not have to go through the wall".

In sum, Trump can be understood as a leader who is open to information, but only the information he receives directly from the political environment. He was extremely pragmatic, changing foreign policy positions as new events occurred and other leaders' positions changed. Trump never worried about looking inconsistent or incoherent, and was willing to promote what Kahl and Brands (2017) defined as an "amoral transactionalism", searching for deal opportunities with any actors that shared United States' interests, even tough these interests were never clearly defined.

Trump as a relationship-oriented leader

In section 3.1, we hypothesized that Trump would be highly responsive to the political context and would center his political interactions around building strong interpersonal relationships with other leaders, looking for group strengthening and image maintenance through his social skills and marketing. We also argued that he would probably be suspicious of other countries and leaders, but willing to engage positively when identifying the possibility of developing strong relationships with these other actors. In the case of U.S foreign policy towards North Korea, this hypothesis is definitely sustained.

As was exposed earlier, Trump was highly responsive to the political context in his foreign policy towards North Korea, making radical changes in his approach as events and leaders' discourses changed. His maximum pressure campaign was a response to North Korea's missile tests, and his subtle change from pressure to engagement was a response to Kim's willing to start a cooperative interaction. It is arguable that he was indeed too responsive, which resulted in flip-flops and poorly designed decision-making. His decision to join Kim for a first summit was made out of spite. A week before the day it was scheduled to, Trump announced the cancelling of the meeting, only to reinstate it the day after. After the first Trump-Kim summit, the American president was quick to announce that there was no longer a nuclear threat from North Korea, even tough the countries had not reached any substantial agreement. In sum, Trump was as responsive to the political context as it gets.

His approach to North Korea was deeply centered around building a strong interpersonal relationship with Kim, to whom Trump referred as a "friend" in multiple circumstances. Trump believed that, through personal bonds with Kim, he would be able to convince the North Korean Chairman to denuclearize. This perception is related to Trump's unwillingness to consult expert advisers, as he understood the negotiations as a personal matter to be settle between the two leaders. As Kuznar (2021, p. 264) explains, "Trump's apparently frequent dismissal of the intelligence community and his "go it alone" style is very consistent with his trust that he instinctually understands Kim Jong-un and that through his personal relationship, he will negotiate successfully". Drezner (2020, p. 52) also points out that

> Multiple accounts suggest that he believes foreign relations are all about strong personal ties between leaders. Indeed, nearly all of Trump's interactions with world leaders are premised on his belief that his ability to charm and cajole foreign leaders is more important than policy goals or strategic aims.

More than that, Trump's approach to North Korea was personalized from the beginning, as it was not showcased as a strategic issue between two antagonistic countries, but as a personal feud between two leaders, as Day and Wedderburn (2022) convincingly highlight. As Trump himself said: This is all about leader versus leader. Man versus man. Me versus Kim (quoted in Woodward, 2018, p. 236). This personalized engagement was perceived not only when Trump and Kim were exchanging insults and threats, but also when they chose the diplomatic path of positive engagement. Both leaders praised each other multiple times and started exchanging what Trump called "beautiful love letters". Besides from the political content in the 27 letters that both leaders exchanged, every single one of them had compliments and words of affirmation regarding their friendship (Woodward, 2020).

Cottam (2021) argues that, despite the absence of a groundbreaking diplomatic agreement that would lead to the denuclearization of North Korea,

> from Trump's standpoint, the two leaders "fell in love" and that there was no longer a nuclear threat from North Korea. This is another example of Trump's personalistic approach to diplomacy and his extraction of individuals from a standing image of a country. North Korea is now evaluated through his relationship with Kim rather than the Rogue image, at least until that relationship becomes negative. (Cottam, 2021, p. 148)

Relationship-oriented leaders praise social skills, persuasion, political marketing, and image maintenance. Those factors were central to Trump's North Korea foreign policy: he tried to bend Kim to his interests through persuasion and social skills, as mentioned before. Trump's trust in his own social skills was one of the central motives for his desire to meet with Kim. Also, Trump's approximation of Kim Jon-Un was a great political marketing move. Before the cooperative approach between the two countries, Trump was portraited by the media as a dangerous president, who would possibly bring the United States to a nuclear war with North Korea. As soon as the peace talks between Trump and Kim began, the media praised him for such a bold initiative and Republicans started talking about the possibility of a Nobel Peace Prize for Trump (Woodward, 2020; Wolff, 2019). Even after the negotiations had faded away, Trump still managed to maneuver his good relationship with Kim towards image maintenance: his meeting with the North Korean Chairman on the Korean Demilitarized Zone yielded innumerous photo-ops and newspaper covers, guaranteeing Trump yet another achievement: being the first U.S president to step into North Korean soil.

Trump's hypothesized suspicion of other leaders but willingness to engage positively is also seen throughout his diplomacy with North Korea. Even before he was elected, Trump mentioned that he would have no problem in meeting with Kim Jon-Un. In spite of that, the tone for the first year of interaction between the two leaders was set by North Korean missile tests, which made Trump suspicious and distrustful of Kim, but still open to dialogue. As the political tide shifted, Trump was opportunistically ready to change his foreign policy approach and engage positively with Kim through a close personal bond.

Overall analysis

Out of the three hypotheses regarding Trump's foreign policy behavior, drawn from his leadership style traits, two are entirely sustained after an analysis of the president's decision-making behavior towards North Korea, and one of them is partially sustained. As explained in section 3.1, the comparison between Trump's hypothesized behavior and his actual behavior allows for the determination of whether or not the personality of Trump acted as a causal mechanism in his foreign policy behavior towards North Korea. In this sense, as most of the hypothesis are sustained, it is fair to assert that Donald Trump's personality traits acted as causal mechanisms in his foreign policy behavior towards North Korea, influencing decisions and behavior.

On this regard, some disclaimers are made necessary. First, arguing that Trump's personality acted as a causal mechanism on his foreign policy behavior towards North Korea is not the same as arguing that his personality was the only force influencing his foreign policy decisions. Second, this argument has no implicit evaluation regarding Trump's foreign policy: stating that his decision-making behavior was influenced by his personality is very different from evaluating his foreign policy in terms of "good and bad" or "effective and ineffective".

It is also important to highlight the conditions under which is possible to assert that a leader's personality can act as a causal mechanism to foreign policy decision-making. These conditions are outlined in chapter one, where I have argued that Donald Trump did not have a consistent or coherent foreign policy, as he had abandoned the principles that had been guiding American foreign policy since the 1940s and did not replace them with a coherent foreign policy agenda. I also argued that Trump is a populist *par excellence*¸ which made his foreign policy more centralized and personalized. More than that, I argued that the decision-making dynamics within the Trump administration led to even greater centralization under Trump. Trump not having predefined principles to follow, being prone to decision-making

centralization and personalization, and dominating the decision-making processes within his administration, are the conditions that allow for Trump's personality to be a causal mechanism in his foreign policy decision-making processes. Of course, this thesis only assesses Trump's foreign policy towards North Korea, and more case studies would be necessary to determine if/how the president's personality affected other dimensions of his foreign policy.

FINAL REMARKS

The presidency of Donald Trump posed many questions to International Relations scholars and Foreign Policy analysts. The election of a president with no prior political or military experience – the first of its kind in American history – proved as unusual as it was expected by many political commentators. Trump brought about change to many aspects of American politics, and foreign policy was one of the areas that went through more transformation. A few years after his departure from the White House, analysist still struggle to define a "Trump Grand Strategy" or "Trump Doctrine", or really any type of pattern that would explain his foreign policy in a comprehensive and coherent manner. As the Trump administration promoted many changes in foreign policy that did not seem to be determined by domestic factors – such as ideology or interest groups – neither by structural changes in the international system, many analysts started searching for explanations about Trump's foreign policy in Trump himself. Individual approaches to decision-making are not new to International Relations and especially not new to the subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis, which was designed to better assess decision-making dynamics, emphasizing the role of individual decision-makers on foreign policy processes. The age of Trump brought a renewed interest to this type of research focus, not only because of Trump, but also because of the populist tide that followed along and introduced the world to many curious characters in power positions.

In this thesis, I engaged with this recent literature in an effort to answer what seems to be a lot of unresolved questions: what drove Trump's foreign policy? Why was it so inconsistent and incoherent? Why even his former cabinet members can't seem to provide a comprehensive explanation for his foreign policy? With these questions in mind, this thesis was dedicated to understanding the reasons for the lack of consistency and coherence in Trump's foreign policy, hypothesizing that the Trump administration was not able to establish a consistent and coherent international strategy because foreign policy decisions were highly influenced by Donald Trump's personal characteristics.

The first step towards answering the research question was defining Trump's foreign policy as inconsistent and incoherent, which was done in the first chapter. Through the engagement with the literature on the Trump administration's foreign policy, it was possible to address how Trump broke the bipartisan pattern of strengthening the international liberal order, which had been followed since the 1940s. Although American presidents had very different foreign policy priorities throughout the decades, Trump was the first post-World

War II president to break with the consensus around the importance of the international liberal order and be actively hostile to its principles, such as free trade, liberal democracy, multilateralism, and respect for human rights. More than abandoning the principles that had been guiding American foreign policy for seven decades, the Trump administration didn't establish new principles to guide its international strategy, which resulted in an amalgam of decisions in which few patterns could be found, and none of them could cohesively explain Trump's foreign policy.

One of these patterns was a populist approach to foreign affairs. Independently of how one defines populism, Trump and his decision-making will probably check most boxes. From the constructed opposition between the "true people" and the "corrupt elites" to the "bad manners", from the uninstitutionalized and unmediated exercise of government to the flammable rhetoric, Trump's foreign policy was filled with populism. But populism alone also could not explain his international strategies. Although many international analysists haven't figured it out yet, populism by itself cannot explain foreign policy strategies: populism is better understood as a *political method,* providing leaders with ideological/discursive frameworks and guidelines for political behavior/performance. Still, understanding Trump as a populist leader is fundamental in the sense that populist leaders tend to make their foreign policies more centralized and personalized, which helps consolidating the proposed hypothesis. Finally, chapter one ends with an analysis of the decision-making dynamics within the Trump administration, strengthening the argument that Trump had control over the decision-making processes and, as a consequence, his personal touch could be felt in many decisions.

Having established that: (i) the Trump administration's foreign policy was inconsistent and incoherent; (ii) Trump's foreign policy displayed his populist approach; and (iii) Trump centralized decision-making processes within his administration, the argument for the proposed hypothesis was strengthened. The next step was to present the tools for the assessment of Trump's personality, which is done in chapter two. After briefly engaging with the history of Foreign Policy Analysis, discussing the ground of the subfield and highlighting the relevance of individual-level analyses in this context, I review the most popular tools for personality assessment in Foreign Policy Analysis, which leads us to Leadership Trait Analysis, the conceptual and methodological framework that guides this thesis.

As exposed in chapter two, Leadership Trait Analysis has been increasingly used in recent years and has proven to be a reliable and relevant framework for the assessment of leaders' personalities. Still, despite acknowledging the relevance of the framework, some

important questions need to be asked. Recently, authors such as Walker, Schafer, and Smith (2018), Fitzsimmons (2020), White (2022), and Thiers and Wehner (2022), have all assessed Trump's personality traits through the Leadership Trait Analysis framework and, although achieving similar results in some cases, there are inconsistencies among the different profiles of Donald Trump and, as such, inconsistencies regarding what are Trump's personality traits and how the affected his foreign policy. Besides from authors who used the automated scoring for LTA, there are also other works, such as Siniver and Featherstone (2020) and Hassan and Featherstone (2022), that only use the concepts from the LTA framework, ignoring the measurable methods provided. From these acknowledgements, many questions arise: Are scores drawn from bigger databases more reliable than those drawn from smaller ones? Can opposing analyses be reliable, if the methods are correctly applied but the results differ? Using the concepts, but not the methods, allows for reliable analyses or simply facilitates biased arguments? This thesis does not engage with these questions, but it would be important for future works to tackle them.

After presenting the conceptual and methodological tools for assessing leaders' personalities, this thesis presents the results related to Trump's personality traits, relying on data from Thiers and Wehner (2022) to assert that Trump challenges constraints, is open to information, and is relationship-oriented. Having established Trump's leadership style, I use the literature on Leadership Trait Analysis to generate hypotheses about his foreign policy decision-making behavior. As the hypotheses are established according to his personality traits, comparing them to Trump's actual foreign policy behavior will allow us to test whether or not the president's personality acted as a causal mechanism in his foreign policy. To test the hypotheses, we analyze the most Trumpian foreign policy case of the Republican's administration: the diplomacy with North Korea. The United States' foreign policy towards North Korea was selected as the case for analysis because it was inconsistent and incoherent – as it went through two diametrically opposite phases – and was very personality conducted by Trump.

After an overview of Trump's foreign policy towards North Korea, this thesis reaches its final section, comparing the hypothesized behavior drawn from Trump's personality traits to his actual behavior regarding North Korea. The results of the analysis show that most of the hypotheses were sustained, allowing for a strong argument that Trump's personality acted as a causal mechanism in his foreign policy decision-making towards North Korea. Of course, more cases need to be assessed in order to extrapolate this argument to Trump's entire foreign policy, but the extremely positive correlation between Trump's personality traits and his

foreign policy behavior regarding North Korea surely hints us towards the conclusion that his foreign policy was influenced by his personality in a more general matter. Through this analysis, we're able to answer the research question, asserting that, in the case of North Korea, Trump's foreign policy was deeply influenced by his personality. As such, the inconsistency and incoherence of his foreign policy could be understood as the result of a sum of foreign policy issues that were not strongly defined by ideology or strategy, but were highly influenced by the president's personal characteristics.

Assessing Trump's personality traits also collaborates for the reformulation of some old presuppositions about when leaders matter. A core argument in the literature regarding the relevance of leaders to decision-making processes is that the individual characteristics of leaders would be more relevant if they had interest and experience in foreign policy issues. Although Trump had a lot of interest in foreign affairs, he had zero experience in that sense. Times have changed and, more than never, we have seen leaders with no prior political experience ascending to power in different countries. Reformulating the conditions under which leaders matter seems important as many old models have fallen due to the political *zeitgeist*. As such, this thesis provides a relevant and replicable model for assessing when leaders matter: If the leader is a populist, controls decision-making processes, and has no consistent foreign policy strategy, there is a high probability that the leader's individual characteristics will play a relevant role in the decision-making processes.

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