



DONALD TRUMP ON SETTING THE PRICE FOR THE U.S. FOREIGN DEFENCE POLICY – TRACING BACK THE OPINIONS OF AN ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

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Abstract: Since 1987, Donald Trump has constantly considered in a critical manner the U.S. foreign defence policy that he understood as the use of the U.S. military for advancing the interests of foreign states. In the context of the 1988, 2000, 2012 and 2016 election campaigns for the U.S. presidency, he strongly argued that this military support should not be provided for free but only in exchange for a fair price to be paid by the states which benefit from it. This paper points out that Trump's position on the exact structure of this price is less clear and that three contrasting views on this issue could plausibly be attributed to him, with the last two ones being more prominent and explicit: firstly, the price includes both the costs for employing the U.S. military and a mark-up, secondly, the price covers only the costs for employing the U.S. military and finally, the price is made up exclusively from a share of the costs for modernising the U.S. military. A possible way of integrating all three views into the U.S. foreign defence policy is also suggested by this paper which concludes that Trump's perspective on this policy is complex and thus resistant to a simple characterization.

Keywords: Donald Trump; U.S. foreign defence policy; price of defence; cost of defence; U.S. military; U.S. presidential elections.

"If we're going to continue to be the policeman of the world, we ought to be paid for it".
(Donald Trump, *Crippled America. How to Make America Great Again*)

Donald Trump's victory against Hillary Clinton in the presidential elections from 2016 was largely a surprise¹ but his candidacy was far less unexpected given that, since 1987, he had been more or less closely associated with the election campaigns for the president of the United States (U.S.). Thus, back

in 1988 he was largely seen as a viable presidential candidate, in 2000 he ran for the U.S. presidency even if he finally abandoned the electoral campaign and in 2004 and again in 2012 he seriously considered running again for this position². As a potential or an actual candidate, Trump expressed his often unconventional views on various aspects of the U.S. policy, including on defence matters, an area where he severely criticized the U.S. decision makers for spending a significant part of the federal budget only to defend largely for free U.S. allied states whose defence was not of vital importance for the U.S. and which, moreover, were sufficiently economically powerful to afford to pay for it. This criticism, coming on the part of a very successful businessman like Trump, is not surprising because it seems natural for such a person to conceive politics in business terms and maintain that actions done for foreign states should bring back money and should not simply be acts of generosity. However, Trump's perspective on the U.S. policy towards other states raises the question of whether he considers that the economically potent allied states should pay

¹ See for example Sam Levin, Zach Stafford, Scott Bixley, *Donald Trump wins presidential election, plunging US into uncertain future*, 10.11.2016, accessed on 25.03.2017 at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/09/donald-trump-wins-us-election-news>, David Francis, *Market Recover from Lows after unexpected Trump Victory*, 09.11.2016, accessed on 13.03.2016 at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/09/markets-recover-from-lows-after-unexpected-trump-victory/>, Karen Tumulty, Philip Rucr, Anne Gearan, *Donald Trump wins the presidency in stunning upset over Clinton*, 09.11.2016, accessed on 24.03.2017 at https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/election-day-an-acrimonious-race-reaches-its-end-point/2016/11/08/32b96c72-a557-11e6-ba59a7d93165c6d4_story.html?utm_term=.6b3d72abcaf7.

² Justin Curtis, *Demystifying the Donald: Trump Past and Present*, 16.02.2016 accessed on 12.01.2017 at <http://harvardpolitics.com/united-states/demystifying-donald-trump-past-present/>.



to the U.S. only the costs for their defence or he thinks that they have to pay the costs together with a mark-up in order for the U.S. to gain more money that it spent for providing it. This paper attempts to formulate an answer to this question and for this purpose there are examined herein Trump's views on this issue that he expressed in the context of the U.S. presidential elections from 1988, 2000, 2012 and 2016.

1. Donald Trump's view on financial aspects of the U.S. foreign defence policy as articulated in the framework of the 1988 U.S. presidential elections

Thirty years ago, in the summer of 1987, Mike Dunbar, a Republican activist from New Hampshire, visited Trump and convinced him to deliver a speech the same year in October at the Portsmouth Rotary Club as traditionally all candidates for Republican presidential nomination did³. Meanwhile, on 2 September, Trump bought one page of advertising space in New York Times, Washington Post and The Boston Globe, three of the most important U.S. newspapers, to present in the form of an open letter his critical views on the foreign defence policy of the United States⁴. This letter was created by the same advertising experts who had worked in 1984 for the successful Ronald Reagan's re-election campaign and it was entitled *There's nothing wrong with America's Foreign Defence Policy that a little Backbone can't cure*⁵.

There was, however, something unusual with this title because it contained the phrase *foreign defence policy* which did not have currency and failed to gain it since then. Trump chose to bring together the terms *foreign* and *defence policy* in order to move beyond the confines of the meaning usually attributed to the latter one in the US politics

³ Katie Keilly, *Meet the Man Who Encouraged Donald Trump to Run for President in 1987*, 12.08.2016, accessed on 08.01.2017 at <http://time.com/4448365/draft-donald-trump-mike-dunbar-new-hampshire/>, Hilary Sargent, *The man responsible for Donald Trump's never-ending presidential campaign*, 22.01.2014 accessed on 25.01.2017 at <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2014/01/22/the-man-responsible-for-donald-trumps-never-ending>

⁴ Michael Oreskes, *Trump Gives a Vague Hint of Candidacy*, 02.09.1987, accessed on 16.02.2017 at <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/02/nyregion/trump-gives-a-vague-hint-of-candidacy>.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

where defence policy designated an exclusively domestic policy concerned with the structure, development, manning, training and equipping of the national military force in order to enable it to repel a potential invasion of the national territory⁶. The foreign dimension added to defence policy was designed to express the idea that this policy also covered the preparation of the US military forces for defending allied states that lacked the capacity to do this by themselves.

In the mentioned letter, Trump drew attention to the fact that the U.S. had spent and continued to spend a significant part of its own budget to ensure for free the defence of foreign states albeit some of them, especially Japan and Saudi Arabia, could afford to pay for it and, moreover, albeit they were not of vital importance for the U.S., they were not willing to help the U.S. when needed and they used the money thus saved to strengthen their economies for becoming more and more serious competitors for the economy of the U.S. Therefore, he argued that this policy enabled many foreign states to profit from the United States and to mock it because of that. Trump also maintained that, in line with this deficient policy, the U.S. were defending the states from the Persian Gulf and were protecting the shipping in that region because Japan and other wealthy states heavily depended on the oil exploited therein and not because that oil was indispensable for the U.S.

Trump equally argued that, as a result of this foreign defence policy being constantly pursued since the end of the Cold War and it being financed with hundreds of billions of dollars, the United States were confronted with serious economic problems which gravely affected large categories of American citizens, especially the farmers, the people needing medical assistance and those who had lost their homes. Consequently, Trump considered that the U.S. had to abandon such a disadvantageous policy and had to demand to the states relying on it for defence to "pay for the protection we extend as allies" which would thus spare the federal budget of the costs for providing this protection.

Trump's criticism is developed from an economic point of view which assumes that the criterion for assessing the U.S. foreign defence policy is represented by the effects that this policy has on the national economy; given that Trump

⁶ Isaiah Wilson III and James J.F. Forest, *Introduction to the Politics of Defence Policy*, pp. 4-5.



made these judgements as a businessman, it could be maintained that he considered this criterion to be valid for the assessment of any other U.S. public policy. Applied to foreign defence policy, this criterion reads that a good policy contributes to strengthening the U.S. economy, while a bad one weakens it. More exactly, a good foreign defence policy has to bring money to the U.S. budget by selling to foreign states the protection provided to them so that defence is turned into a service that could be bought at a certain price and foreign states are turned into customers, more exactly into customer states. It is unclear from Trump's letter if the foreign states should pay to the U.S. only the costs determined by the provision of this service, which could be conveniently called foreign defence service, or if the price they pay should also include a mark-up. In the latter case it follows that a good foreign defence policy is for Trump that one out of which the U.S. makes profit. His mentioning of the fact that the payments made to the U.S. by the foreign states it defends would eliminate the financial burden represented for the federal budget by the costs for defending them does not necessarily mean that Trump is of the opinion that all that the customer states should pay is the cost of this service, no mark-up being included in its final price.

The lack of clarity on the issue of the structure of the final price for the foreign defence service together with the fact that a profit oriented approach is specific for a business activity allow one to reasonably consider that the businessman Donald Trump conceived the price of the foreign defence service as including a mark-up.

Both possible views on the structure of the price of this service are incompatible with this one being provided for free to those allies who can afford paying for it and whose defence does not serve vital interests of the United States, but these views are compatible with this service being provided in this way to those states that do not have the financial resources to buy it and whose defence is of paramount importance for the United States, given that in this last case the United States pay in fact for its own defence and not for the defence of others. Irrespective of which reading of the price for the foreign defence service is upheld, its provision in exchange for a price implies that the United States should no more assure the defence

of Japan and Saudi Arabia if these states refuse to pay for this service. Considered from this point of view, the foreign defence policy criticised by Trump looks like a purely altruistic one because it consists in directing significant financial resources of the U.S. for supporting foreign states without expecting anything in return, not even gratitude. Trump's letter indirectly warns that the pursuing of such a policy entails more and more economic difficulties for the U.S. which at a certain point in the future could make the implementation of this policy extremely costly for the American society. Based on his letter, this dangerous evolution could be explained as the consequence of two simultaneous factors: firstly, the constant reduction of the U.S. budget (against the background of the U.S. economy being weakened by the economies of defended foreign states competing with it) and secondly, the constant or the increased level of the expenses for defending foreign states which lead to a more and more large share of the U.S. budget being appropriate for this purpose at the expense of the needs of the American citizens.

When later that year, on 22 October, Trump spoke before a large audience at Portsmouth Rotary Club, he reiterated his criticism towards the U.S. defence policy practiced abroad and explicitly included Kuwait among the foreign states that, alongside Japan and Saudi Arabia, benefited most as a result of it. He expressed his conviction that, through skilfully conducted negotiations, all states defended by the U.S. could be determined to pay for the defence it provided to them and this would bring to the federal budget 200 billion dollars representing its whole deficit. Trump judged this solution for equilibrating the federal budget as much better than the alternative one represented by the raising of taxes for the U.S. taxpayers and his point of view was enthusiastically endorsed by the participants⁷. It is unclear from Trump's address if the estimated money other states had to pay to the U.S. for their defence included a mark-up or represented only how much the U.S. spent for it.

Donald Trump's public positions on U.S. politics fuelled speculations that he was going to be the rival of George H.W. Bush in the Republican

⁷ Fox Butterfield, *New Hampshire Speech Earns Praise for Trump*, 23, 10, 1987, accessed on 30.03.2017 at <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/23/nyregion/new-hampshire-speech-earns-praise-for-trump.html>.



Party presidential primaries that were to decide the Republican candidate for the U.S. presidential elections from 1988. However, Trump denied his presidential ambitions after publishing his letter⁸ and equally while preparing his appearance at the Portsmouth Rotary Club⁹ and finally he did not run in the Republican elections.

2. The U.S. foreign defence policy¹⁰ advanced by Donald Trump as a candidate for the Reform Party nomination in the 2000 U.S. presidential elections

In 1999 Trump took very seriously the idea of running for the president of the United States in the 2000 elections, but this time on the part of the Reform Party, and presented his political views in *The America We Deserve*, a book published in January 2000¹¹. In the chapter dedicated to foreign policy, Trump criticised the American politicians for helping free of charge various states, including by military defending them, because in his view this generosity prevented the U.S. from concluding deals with these states which would result in them receiving a bill for the given support¹². The business language he used to express his dissatisfaction gives no clear indication about the structure of the price for the foreign defence service which thus could be said to encompass only the costs for its provision or these costs plus a mark-up.

However, Trump's ideas about how the US should conduct its foreign defence policy seem incompatible with his contention, made in the same chapter of that book, that the U.S. has to use military force exclusively to defend its vital strategic interests, no other reason justifying the resort to such an action, not even the protection of innocent foreigners who are killed abroad¹³. If this is the only case when the U.S. could make recourse to military force abroad, than the U.S. could not

⁸ Michael D'Antonio, *Never Enough. Donald Trump and the Pursuit of Success*, p. 182.

⁹ Fox Butterfield, *op.cit.*

¹⁰ Neither in this book, nor in the other texts that will be further analysed in this article, Trump uses the term *foreign defence policy* but, given its capacity to concisely express an elaborated idea, I shall continue using it with the same meaning he attributed to it in his 1987 letter.

¹¹ Justin Curtis, *op.cit.*

¹² Donald Trump and Dave Shiflett, *The America We Deserve*, pp. 141-142.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 112-114.

always military defend other states in exchange for a price, irrespective of it encompassing only the costs or both the costs and the mark-up, because its vital strategic interests are not necessarily threatened each time the defence of its customer states is at stake. Within Trump's thinking on foreign policy, the lack of permanent coincidence between the vital interests of the U.S. and the interests of states it defends follows from the fact that the latter have to pay the U.S. for defending them by military means, a conditionality that would not exist if their defence were always of vital interest for the U.S.

A possible way of reconciling the two ideas is to suppose that for Trump it is in the vital interest of the U.S. to honour the defence contracts it concluded with its customer states because otherwise the U.S. would lose its credibility as a business partner and implicitly huge revenues that represent a major contribution to the federal budget and to the economic development of the U.S. Another way of reconciling the two points of view upheld by Trump is to suppose that the threshold for the use of military force applies only for the cases the U.S. pays for it from its own budget and does not cover the situations the US is paid for defending another state. The second solution seems more adequate because it allows for the vital interests of the U.S. to be clearly separated from the vital interests of its customer states, a distinction that plays an important part in Trump's reasoning. Moreover, under this solution one could maintain that, in exchange for a given price, the U.S. could use its military forces to protect against life threatening situations the innocent people from foreign countries which mean that in such a case it is possible for the US to conduct what is usually called a military humanitarian intervention.

3. Donald Trump's account of the U.S. foreign defence policy developed against the background of the 2012 U.S. presidential elections

In 2004 Trump again considered the possibility of running for the president of the United States in the elections scheduled for that year but in the end he decided against mounting an electoral campaign¹⁴. In 2011 Trump seemed more determined to enter the race for the 2012 presidential elections but, due to poor results in the polls, he opted for suspending its

¹⁴ Justin Curtis, *op.cit.*



campaign¹⁵. Despite not being a candidate, Trump released in December 2011 a new book, *Time to Get Tough: Making America # 1 Again*, in which he presented his views on US domestic and foreign policy. Here he argued that the U.S. president should be a very good international business negotiator capable to obtain from other countries important economic benefits for the U.S. According to Trump, U.S. politicians had to negotiate with foreign governments exactly like the best negotiators from the world of finance who "are hard-driving, vicious, cutthroat financial killers, the kind of people who leave blood all over the boardroom table and fight to the bitter end to gain the maximum advantage"¹⁶. From the perspective of these qualities of an ideal president, he severely criticised the outcome of the negotiations between the U.S. and two states whose defence heavenly depended on the U.S. military: South Korea and Iraq. With respect to the negotiations with the former one, Trump argued that the Obama administration, despite having by far the strongest negotiating power, concluded a free-trade agreement which in fact provided more benefits to South Korea instead of securing from its ally as much economic concessions as possible.

Trump did not explicitly elaborate on the U.S. assets but in the same paragraph where he expressed his judgement over this deal he equally mentioned that South Korea wanted the U.S. to defend it against North Korea, a reference which could be read as implying that the provision of this military support had to be used as a leverage in these negotiations¹⁷. Trump equally argued that the U.S. should determine South Korea to pay it back all costs incurred by its defence¹⁸. This example suggests that Trump considers that, for the provided military defence, a state should pay to the U.S. both the costs, which have a determined value, and the mark-up whose value should be established by negotiations at the maximum possible level and which has to be indirectly paid by allied states through economic agreements which favour the U.S.

Time to Get Tough: Making America # 1 Again also includes a critical analysis of the 2003 Iraq war¹⁹. Trump mentioned that the U.S. spent around 1.5 trillion dollars and sacrificed the lives of thousands of its servicemen and servicewomen to overthrow Saddam Hussein, bringing thus freedom to the Iraqi people, and subsequently to defend Iraq especially against its neighbour Iran. Trump reproached the U.S. politicians their inability to determine the democratically elected Iraqi authorities to pay back these huge costs covered by American taxpayers as well as compensations to the wounded veterans and to the families of those killed on duty and he even argued that the U.S. was entitled to temporarily seize some of Iraq's oil reserves as a last option for getting them pay this bill. Moreover, Trump considered that, for avoiding these difficulties, the U.S. should have concluded prior to the war a deal with the Iraqi opposition abroad on the repayment of the financial and human costs for liberating and defending Iraq; thus Trump implicitly argues that the war had not to be waged in case of failure of these negotiations.

Trump's criticism reveals that in his view the Iraqi government had to reimburse to the U.S. only the costs for the use of its armed forces to oust Saddam from power and latter to defend Iraq, costs which include the compensations for the wounded and killed U.S. military personnel. It follows that the U.S. should add no mark-up to the price the Iraqi authorities have to pay to it but this conclusion stands in sharp contrast with the ideal U.S. politician as described by Trump because such a politician is supposed to gain for his country maximum financial benefits from any deal concluded with a foreign state. If all that such a politician should obtain from the Iraqi government is the reimbursement of the financial and human costs for the military operations, he would be a weak politician according to Trump's own standards because there is no mark-up for the U.S. and no "cutthroat financial killer" could be satisfied with spending a huge amount of money only for getting it back and he could not proudly present this deal as one which maximises the economic benefits for the U.S.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Donald Trump, *Time to Get Tough: Making America # 1 Again*, p. 13.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 9-13.



4. The U.S. foreign defence policy developed by Donald Trump as candidate for the Republican Party nomination and as the Republican Party candidate in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections

In 2015, Trump decided one again to enter the race for the U.S. presidency but this time he went all the way to it and finally won the elections to become the 45th president of the United States. In his announcement speech delivered on 16 June 2015, Trump denounced the US foreign defence policy towards Saudi Arabia because its financial potential was not exploited²⁰. According to Trump, the mere existence of the fabulously rich Saudi Arabia is entirely dependent on the military defence provide by the U.S. so that the U.S. is in the right position to make Saudi Arabia "pay a fortune" for this defence; however, the U.S. politicians do not use this opportunity and they ignore that "there is so much wealth there that can make our country so rich again". Trump's wording suggests that the U.S. should obtain from Saudi Arabia the maximum possible financial benefits in return for its defence which means that Saudi Arabia has not only to reimburse the costs for the provided defence but also to pay a significant mark-up. This reading is also consistent with one idea that have been attributed to Trump in the previous chapter, namely that the U.S. politicians should turn the vital need of its customer states for the U.S. foreign defence service into an element of pressure within the process of negotiating the price for this service.

Later that year, in November, Trump released a new book on his political views which bore the title *Crippled America. How to Make America Great Again*. One of the topics considered therein is the Gulf War from the early '90 fought by the U.S. and its allies for ending up Iraq's occupation of Kuwait without any vital interest of the U.S. being thus advanced. Trump indicates that this war cost the U.S. many billions of dollars and claimed lives of its servicemen and servicewomen but that the restored Kuwait leadership paid to the U.S. nothing in return albeit "they would have paid anything" if prior to the war the U.S. would have concluded a deal with them on how much Kuwait

had to pay for its liberation²¹. In an indirect manner, Trump mentions that such a deal could include the obligation for Kuwait to make certain investments in the U.S. economy; more exactly, while criticising the inability of the U.S. politicians in relation with Kuwait leadership he expresses his indignation against the fact that some Kuwait businessmen that he personally knew did not want to invest in the U.S. and were allowed to take such a decision²².

Trump's view on how the U.S. had to negotiate with Kuwait seems to indicate that the U.S. should have used the difficult situation the Kuwait leaders were faced with in order to negotiate with them a financial arrangement maximising the U.S. benefits in exchange for its military involvement. Thus interpreted, these negotiations had to determine Kuwait to cover all costs for the military actions of the U.S. as well as to pay a consistent mark-up for them, the final price going well beyond what the U.S. spent for conducting these operations; as previously indicated, it could be said that a way for Kuwait to pay this price is by investing in the U.S.

When, in the same book Trump examines the financial benefits the U.S. should secure on the part of Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Germany and United Kingdom, wealthy states whose defence it assures, he mentions that they only have to share in the costs for supplying the U.S. military with the most technologically advanced equipment and for providing its forces with the best training in order to turn it into the most powerful military in the world²³. Trump emphasises that the share from the total costs for modernising the U.S. military that these states must pay should be a fair one. He appreciates that having an unrivalled military is of the utmost importance to the U.S. and that this is also indispensable for providing other states with an effective defence which thus gives to those states a strong incentive for paying a fair share of the total costs²⁴. It is to be observed that the costs the allied states are supposed to pay are directed towards strengthening the U.S. military, thus advancing a vital interest of the U.S. and of their own, and not towards covering what the U.S. spends exclusively for defending those states and

²¹ Donald Trump, *Crippled America. How to Make America Great Again*, pp. 32-33.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 33.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 48-49.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

²⁰ Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech, 16.06.2015 accessed on 14. 03.2017 at <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>.



which thus serve only their vital interests. Trump equally indicates that the financial contribution paid by allied states in exchange for their defence not only enables the U.S. to better defend itself, but also helps boosting the U.S. economy as a result of the military equipment being produced in the U.S.

Therefore, by simply paying a share of the costs for improving the capabilities of the U.S. military, the allied states serve two vital interests of the United States – an economic interest and a military one – which could explain why Trump considers that they do not have to pay a mark-up to the U.S. for being defended. It is to be pointed out that the fact that the costs covered by the allied states should be fair could reasonably be read as indicating that they should pay the maximum value of these costs related to the peculiar aspects of the defence provided to them.

One could observe that Trump's book supports two different interpretations of the financial obligations incumbent to those states defended by the U.S. According to the first interpretation, which is only implicit and refers to Kuwait alone, these states have to pay back to the U.S. the costs, which have a determined value, and also a mark-up, whose value is established through negotiations. According to the second interpretation, that is explicit and refers to more states, they have to pay back to the U.S. only a fraction of the costs entailed by strengthening the U.S. military; one could reasonably argue that this fraction has to be continuously paid given the speed of the technological progress which makes necessary for new equipment to be provided to the U.S. military for keeping it the best in the world. However, it is to be remarked that both interpretations could be applied with respect to the states defended by the U.S. because Trump's ideas do not rule out the possibility that these states constantly pay a share of the costs for modernising the U.S. military and a price made up of all costs together with a mark-up for the situations in which the U.S. engages in military actions for defending them. Under this reading, Kuwait had to pay a price for its liberation and has also to constantly cover a fraction of the costs for maintaining the supremacy of the U.S. military. Trump's book does not provide enough elements for deciding which reading of the financial obligations incumbent to the states defended by the U.S. is the right one so that any of these interpretations could be given to Trump's

assertion that "If we're going to continue to be the policeman of the world, we ought to be paid for it"²⁵.

Trump further elaborated on his views on the U.S. foreign defence policy in a long interview he gave to New York Times at the end of March 2016²⁶. Here he argues that the United States assumed the responsibility to defend other states for free in a period of its history when it had enough economic strength to be able to maintain and develop by itself an extremely powerful military. Trump appreciates that the present state of the U.S. economy no more enables it to dispose of the best military and that for having even an obsolete military the U.S. is obliged to borrow money from other states like China and Japan. For these reasons Trump considers that the U.S. is "not being properly reimbursed for every penny that we spend" by the states it defends.

It is to be remarked that, as described by Trump, the defence commitments that the U.S. assumed towards other states when its economy was highly competitive, were not aimed at obtaining any money from their part, albeit there is no reason to suppose that such an objective could not have been pursued. Moreover, the fact that the U.S. has now to ask the states it defends to reimburse as much as possible from the costs entailed by their defence is presented by Trump as a resulting from its economic weakness which forces it to adopt this position. If in this interview Trump's position were that the U.S. foreign defence policy has to generate financial benefits for it, such as a mark-up, he would criticise the previous U.S. policy in this field for failing to do exactly that and would not justify in terms of the U.S. economic incapacity the need for this policy to be now changed. Consequently, in the mentioned interview Trump does not conceive the U.S. foreign defence policy as an activity that is meant to generate a mark-up for the U.S., but as an activity which, under the present unfavourable conditions for the U.S. economy, requires for its costs to be reimbursed by its beneficiaries. It is also to be noticed that here Trump no more makes dependent the achievement of the U.S. vital interest of having the strongest military on the reimbursement of the

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

²⁶ *Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views*, 26.03.2016 accessed on 02.04.2017 at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html>.



costs for the defence provided by the U.S. to other states, which makes the provision of defence to them, even when they cover all costs, to look like a favour done to its partners and thus like something the U.S. has nothing to gain from.

In the first speech on foreign policy from his campaign, Trump reiterated the need for the states defended by the U.S. to "pay for the costs of this defence" and emphasized that the U.S. had to defend them no more if they refuse to pay this money²⁷. He also argued therein that a larger share from the U.S. budget should be appropriate for the defence sector in order to provide the U.S. military with the best available equipment and thus to turn it into an unrivalled military. It is to be observed that there is nothing in this speech clearly indicating that Trump considers that the states that are defended should pay a mark-up to the U.S. for it doing that but, instead, that herein he explicitly argues that these ones should cover the costs associated with the provided defence. It is equally to be remarked that Trump appreciates that the US could build up the strongest possible military by using exclusively the U.S. financial resources but one could mention that the reliance only on this source of founding presupposes that the U.S. no more defends other states as a result of them not paying the corresponding costs. In this case the financial burden bore by the U.S. for purchasing cutting edge technology is shared with no other state but, since the U.S. has to defend no foreign states, the budget for defence is not as large as when the U.S. pays in their place the costs for defending them.

Later on in the electoral campaign, in July 2016, Trump gave another interview to New York Times where he tackled again the issue of the financial obligations towards the U.S. of the states that it military defends²⁸. He argued that for the U.S. to make a good deal with these states on this sensitive topic it has to determine them to pay a significant part of the costs for their defence currently covered by the U.S. No distinct reference to the need for these states to pay a mark-up to the U.S. is here

²⁷ Donald J. Trump, *Foreign Policy Speech*, 27.04.2016, accessed on 16.02.2017 at <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/donald-j.-trump-foreign-policy-speech>.

²⁸ *Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey's Coup Attempt and the World* 21.07.2016 accessed on 03.04.2017 at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/donald-trump-foreign-policy-interview.html>.

made by Trump so that all that he requires them to pay is not all costs entailed by their defence, but only a consistent share of them. Moreover, he mentions that such an arrangement represents a good deal which means that in his view one could make such a deal even without getting any mark-up.

CONCLUSIONS

The necessity for the U.S. to be paid by those states that rely on its military for advancing their legitimate interests²⁹ is the first major issue approached by Trump in 1987 when he was seen for the first time as a potential candidate for the presidency of the United States and it remained a central topic for him ever since. Trump grounded his contention on two arguments, namely that the U.S. economy, unlike in the past, can no more support these expenses and that it should no more cover them when none of its vital interests are at stake. But what exactly Trump considers that these states have to pay in return for being supported by the U.S. military is not straightforward because three positions on this matter could be attributed to him.

The first position is that such states are supposed to pay only the costs incurred by the U.S. for using its military to advance their interests, costs that otherwise would simply not exist for the U.S. budget. This position is to be found in the 1987 letter, in the books published in 2000 and in 2011, in the two interviews he gave for New York Times in 2016 as well as in his first speech on foreign policy delivered the same year. This position makes difficult to explain in the framework of Trump's reasoning why the U.S. would defend its allies only in return for the costs - and thus without obtaining any financial profit and without promoting any vital interest of its own – given that in his view the U.S. politicians have to behave in foreign policy like the best negotiators in the world of international finance and consequently they have to always strive for the maximum advantages. In line with the first position, what the U.S. politicians should only aim at is getting back the money spent in the interest of other states but such a course of action can be called

²⁹ It could be said that Trump identifies three such interests: defense of the national territory, liberation of the national territory occupied by foreign forces and the protection of the population against extreme violence.



neither a good foreign defence policy, according to Trump's standards for a successful politician, nor a good deal according to the usual standards for a successful businessmen like Trump.

The second position, which is to be found in Trump's book from 2015, reads that the states relying on the U.S. military for advancing their interests have to pay to the U.S. a significant share of the costs entailed by making the U.S. military the most powerful in the world and by keeping it that way. The costs for achieving this objective are paid by the U.S. irrespective of providing military support to other states, as indicated in Trump's speech from April 2016, which means that, by assigning this function to its military in exchange for a share of the costs for modernising it, the U.S. reduces its defence budget and stimulates its economy by financing with the money thus received the production in the U.S. of equipment for its military. Under this position, the U.S. advances its own vital interests by securing the interest of foreign states and in this way one is provided with an explanation for the U.S. foreign defence policy which accords with how Trump thinks the U.S. politicians should act in foreign policy and also with the profit oriented approach peculiar to successful businessmen. The fact that this position reads that the U.S. politicians must determine foreign states to pay a fair share from the costs for modernising the U.S. military could be equated with them being required to obtain from them the maximum possible amount of money relative to the degree of their reliance on U.S. military.

A third position, which could be identified in his letter from 1987 and in all his books, specifies that the states which advance their interest with the help of the U.S. military should pay to it a price which includes both the costs incurred to the U.S. and a mark-up whose value should be decided by negotiations at the maximum possible level in the given context. In this position, the foreign defence service is conceived as designed to bring profit for the U.S. and therefore, there is an explanation for the provision of this service with the objectives Trump thinks that are to be pursued by the U.S. politicians in relation with foreign states and which is also consistent with the profit oriented approach followed by successful businessmen.

It is not possible to clearly indicate how Trump considers that these three positions are to be all

integrated in the U.S. foreign defence policy, but one could speculate on how this could be done. To this purpose, it is first necessary to better discriminate between them by indicating that the first position refers exclusively to the costs for using the U.S. military to promote only the interests of another state (e.g. costs generated by maintaining troops and military equipment in another state or by employing them in combat), that the second position refers exclusively to the costs for modernising the U.S. military thus leaving aside the costs for using it in support of the interests of other states, and that within the third position the costs included in the price are occasioned by the U.S. military being used to further the interests of another state while the mark-up is intended to finance the modernization of the U.S. military. Under this reading, the costs for using the U.S. military to advance the interests of other states are generated only as long as the activities necessary for the attainment of this objective take place, while the costs for modernising the U.S. military are permanently generated as a result of the rapid technological progress. A state which covers a share of the costs for the modernization of the U.S. military, when it needs the U.S. military for pursuing its legitimate interests, it has to pay only the costs generated by its use. When a state which does not cover the costs for the modernisation of the U.S. military needs the U.S. military for supporting its legitimate interests, it has to pay the costs generated for the U.S. by the use of its military and also a mark-up that will be directed towards the modernization of the U.S. military. In both cases a clear financial benefit for the U.S. results from its foreign defence policy so that by pursuing it under these financial conditions a politician would comply with Trump's standards for a good politician but would also act according to the business logic of profit.

The issue of the price to be paid to the U.S. by the states it defends, despite being a prominent one in Trump's thinking about the U.S. foreign defence policy, is rather blurred and it proved to be resistant to a simple characterization. The analytical approach developed in this article serves not only the purpose of conceptual clarification, but it equally aims at providing a conceptual framework for considering the foreign defence policy that will be pursued by the Trump administration.



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