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The World Adrift between Orders: The History of the American Far Right and its Impact on U.S.–Mexico Relations. Past and Present

A la deriva entre órdenes mundiales: la historia de la extrema derecha en Estados Unidos y su impacto en las relaciones Estados Unidos–México. Pasado y presente

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Abstract

Taking a long-term historical perspective, this article delves into the history of shifting political orders and far-right rebellions in the United States, examining their profound impact on U.S.–Mexico relations. Far-right rebellions are complex political phenomena, deeply rooted in three distinct American political traditions and movements: populism, illiberalism, and isolationism. All three have periodically reshaped the landscape of American politics, notably during transitions such as the current crisis facing the Washington Consensus and the liberal international order. In the past, U.S.–Mexico relations appeared insulated from the far-right rebellions that periodically emerge from political transitions. However, this is no longer the case. The rise of Trumpism today has established the foundational framework for a new era of strained U.S.–Mexico relations amid escalating geopolitical instability on a global scale.

Key words: U.S.–Mexico relations, populism, illiberalism, isolationism, Trumpism, far-right extremism, New Deal, Washington Consensus, North America.

Resumen

Desde una perspectiva histórica de largo alcance, este artículo estudia cómo en Estados Unidos los cambios de órdenes políticos y las rebeliones de extrema derecha han afectado las relaciones con México. Estas rebeliones son fenómenos políticos complejos arraigados en tres tradiciones y movimientos políticos estadounidenses: el populismo, el "iliberalismo" y la política de aislamiento, que han moldeado periódicamente el panorama político de Estados Unidos, especialmente en momentos de transición como la crisis que actualmente enfrentan el Consenso de Washington y el orden liberal internacional. En el pasado, las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y México han logrado mantenerse al margen. Pero todo cambió con la irrupción del trumpismo. Se ha reconfigurado el consenso bipartidista sobre México abriendo paso a una

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nueva etapa de tensiones en la relación bilateral, y todo esto en medio de una creciente inestabilidad geopolítica a nivel mundial.

Palabras clave: relaciones México-Estados Unidos, populismo, iliberalismo, política de aislamiento, trumpismo, New Deal, consenso de Washington, Norteamérica.

Introduction

Over the past decade, a far-right rebellion has moved from the margins to the mainstream of American society. The rebellion triggered an authoritarian backlash and radicalized politics. It took hold of large swaths of society on which the Republican Party is based. Far-right rebellions are complex political phenomena, but most are deeply rooted in three distinct American political traditions and movements: populism, illiberalism, and isolationism. All three have periodically reshaped the landscape of American politics, notably during transitions such as the current crisis facing the Washington Consensus and the liberal international order. In the past, U.S.–Mexico relations appeared to have been insulated from those far-right rebellions that periodically emerge from political transitions in American society. However, this is no longer the case. As the far-right takes over the GOP, its potential to foster a climate of division and geopolitical tension in North America could continue to shape the future of bilateral relations between both nations.

The political history of far-right extremism[1] and anti-establishment upheavals in the United States has been an understudied aspect of U.S.–Mexico relations, and this aspect is worth exploring as we approach another cycle of presidential elections. Every twelve years, presidential elections coincide in the United States and Mexico, and 2024 is one of those years. During these electoral moments, conflict and cooperation are experienced even more intensely in a relationship as complex, asymmetric, and interdependent as the one created between Mexico and the United States. Subtle shifts are amplified by the nearly 2,000 miles of land border shared by both neighboring countries in North America. International issues are redefined by the domestic dimension of both countries, and what renders the analysis of bilateral ties truly distinctive is this fusion, often characterized as "intermestic," with issues straddling both the international and domestic realms. Facing this reality, specialists and practitioners understandably drive debates that focus on a compartmentalized, short-term view

[1] Stanford University's "MMO: Mapping the Global Far Right" defines far-right extremism as a "diverse set of organizations and ideologies are associated with the far-right. Broadly, far-right extremist ideology in the United States can be classified into three categories: racist extremism, nativist extremism, and anti-government extremism." (Stanford University et al., 2022)

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of single issues like migration, security, the border; or simply on trade, or on single elections, administrations, and short-lived political moments that throw the discussion into a permanent state of political emergency.

Political analysis stands as one of the prominent victims of punditry and short-term thinking. During election years as intense as 2024, journalists, diplomats, politicians, and policymakers are always reactive to hot-button issues in Mexico and the United States. When they engage in foreign policy discussions, they lurch from one political emergency to the next until it becomes all too difficult to see past single political issues or electoral cycles that span over short periods of time. Their debates are often bogged down by these short-term cycles; explanations that address anything prior to the 1980s—only forty years back—are often considered long-term vision. In this permanent state of emergency, it becomes difficult to chart a future course for U.S.–Mexico relations that takes long-term historical thinking and long-term analysis seriously, partly because the focus is solely on present news cycles and electoral cycles, or on fleeting political events that historians of the *longue durée* (the long term) would deem as nothing but "surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs" (Braudel, 1996: 21).

However, political history and analysis need not follow the short-term timespan. To understand our current state of turmoil, it is necessary to delve into politics through the expansive prism of long-term political history. That is why long-term strategic thinking has surged to the forefront, posing interesting questions that illuminate the current state of U.S.–Mexico relations in different ways. What political events, ideologies, and orders have shaped North America's history over the past 100 years? How are they shaping the present, and how could they shape the future? Considering long-term historical thinking, where is the U.S.–Mexico relationship heading, and what are the different political visions of a continental future, the dead ends, the alternatives, and the forking paths between both countries? These questions matter. North American political history, society, and culture matter, and so do broader visions, narratives, and ideas about the U.S.–Mexico relationship. But they are often missing from the broader debates over North America's future, even though such matters require strategic foresight and a far-reaching view of the past that takes history and long-term analysis seriously.

Fortunately, the debate is changing, and foreign policy publications are beginning to debate the question of strategic foresight for the bilateral relationship (Payan, 2020). As a result, historians and grand strategists keep joining the policy discussion to try to understand the history that has led us to where we are right now; to envision our past and present over a longer period of time while charting a strategic path toward the future.

The present dossier is a response to this urgent need. Its central idea that Trumpism will survive, with or without Donald J Trump, has been framed in these deliberately provocative and somewhat fatalistic terms. What this proposition implies is that Trump himself is just a fleeting manifestation of deeper changes, a symptom of problems that have taken root in the United States over the years. If Trump loses power today, if he's defeated at the ballot box in 2024, tomorrow there will be someone else to replace him.

The volatility and confusion provoked by Trumpism stems from a profound crisis in the current political and international order: the crisis of the Washington Consensus, also referred to as the neoliberal order. And closely interconnected with the latter is the crisis of the liberal international order that reigned supreme after the Cold War (Mearsheimer, 2019). Turmoil follows whenever a long-standing economic and political order begins to falter, and turmoil worsens whenever an equally long-standing hegemonic power like the United States feels like it's losing some of its grip on the international order. This partly explains the political upheaval that has seen the radicalization of the Republican Party and its foreign policy toward Mexico.

Our current world is adrift between orders. The erosion of democracy over the past 40 years and the transition between political orders since the Great Recession of 2008–2009 partly explain the rise of Donald Trump, Trumpism, and the MAGA movement. Even though we cannot speak of the fall of the Washington Consensus yet, we can certainly speak of its decline:

The credibility of neoliberalism's faith in unfettered markets as the surest road to shared prosperity is on life-support these days. And well it should be. The simultaneous waning of confidence in neoliberalism and in democracy is no coincidence or mere correlation. Neoliberalism has undermined democracy for 40 years. (Stiglitz, 2019)

Even after the Great Recession of 2008–2009, the late historian Tony Judt wrote that "the little crash of 2008 was a reminder that unregulated capitalism is its own worst enemy … if we do no more than pick up the pieces and carry on as before, we can look forward to greater upheavals in years to come (2010).

In this article, I examine the embattled state of U.S.–Mexico relations against the long-term history of far-right rebellions and authoritarian backlashes in the United States. For many decades, bilateral relations remained insulated from these upheavals—until now, when everything began to change, and the world seems adrift between orders. As Antonio Gramsci described the state of world affairs around the Great War (1914–1918): "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old world is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass" (Gramsci, 2011, 32–3). Slavoj Žižek called this interregnum

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the "time of monsters" (Žižek, 2010). In this transition, a great variety of symptoms have appeared with the resurgence of populism, illiberalism, and isolationism. These deep-rooted political traditions have formed a new blend of jingoism against Mexico that is seriously jeopardizing the bilateral relationship. It cannot be overstated just how dangerous this moment is for the future stability of U.S.–Mexico relations, and consequently, for regional peace in North America.

The Evolving Political and International Orders: A Long-Term Historical View of U.S.–Mexico Relations

In the last hundred years, bilateral relations between Mexico and the United States have been shaped by two political orders: the New Deal order that dominated U.S.–Mexico relations and welfare states around the mid-twentieth century, and the neoliberal order that spurred free-market integration in North America during the post-Cold War era and our present times. This somewhat simplified periodization in American political history came from historians Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle.

Both historians were concerned that the political debate in the United States was too centered around single administrations and short-term electoral cycles, so they brought back the idea that politics can be studied from a long-term historical perspective, and they began to work on a framework for understanding long-established political orders. For Fraser and Gerstle, "political order" connotes a constellation of ideologies, foreign policies, public policies, economic alliances, consensus politics, and constituencies that have shaped and dominated American society, politics, and political systems. Political order, in this extended sense, explains longer political periods "in ways that endure beyond the two-, four-, and six-year election cycles" (Gerstle, 2022: 2).

Along these lines, Fraser and Gerstle reordered American political history around two major political orders—the New Deal order (1930s–1980) and the neoliberal order (1980–present). Within this historical framework of political orders, two distinctive periods of consensus politics emerged: the postwar liberal consensus that emerged from the New Deal order, and the Washington Consensus from the neoliberal order.

> At the heart of each of these two political orders stood a distinctive program of political economy. The New Deal order was founded on the conviction that capitalism left to its own devices spelled economic disaster. It had to be managed by a strong central state able to govern the economic system in the public interest. The neoliberal order, by contrast,

> was grounded in the belief that market forces had to be liberated from government regulatory controls that were stymieing growth, innovation, and freedom. The architects of the neoliberal order set out in the 1980s and 1990s to dismantle everything that the New Deal order had built across its forty-year span. Now it, too, is being dismantled. (Gerstle, 2022: 3)

In shaping their definition of a political order, Fraser and Gerstle found their inspiration in the conceptual analyses of electoral systems and party structures developed in political science. They also drew from the "new political historians" who examined American political history since 1800 in terms of "relatively long periods of electoral stability punctuated by brief but intense political upheavals and electoral realignments" (Fraser and Gerstle, 2020: x).

Today's social fervors have gripped the United States before. They have gripped American society during moments of intense debate and controversy surrounding U.S. involvement in major wars, like the debate on U.S. involvement in the First and Second World Wars; or during moments of deep change in the worldview sustaining the political consensus of the time, or when there is a major change in political and economic orders. During these moments, dissent from those previously excluded bursts onto the scene, and the prevailing consensus and political order suddenly come under attack, with social fervors gripping the nation at a particular junction. Today, the United States stands at another junction, like it did in the decades of the 1880s–1890s, the 1930s–1940s, or the 1960s–1970s. The strident political passions you see today are the best indicators of a transitional moment at play.

U.S.–Mexico relations stand as one of the most stable and underestimated pillars of the so-called Pax Americana that cloaked the international order after the Second World War and during the Cold War. The relationship, asymmetrical as it has always been, survived relatively unscathed as both Mexico and the United States were able to navigate these turbulent transitions between political orders. Remarkably, the relationship not only endured, but thrived. This does not mean that the relationship was frictionless. Moments of heightened tension paced the diplomatic relationship during the difficult transition from the New Deal order to the neoliberal order. Relations swung as Mexico went through economic and social crises, and swirling scares of military coups. "El peso del golpe, y el golpe del peso" as one journalist described the years of 1973, when President Luis Echeverría feared his fate would resemble that of his counterpart Salvador Allende in Chile, while the oil shock continued to unravel the Mexican economy in 1973. Bilateral relations were rocked by the crises of 1968 and 1976, and the chaotic transfer of power between Mexico's *sexenios*—especially in 1976 and 1982—that overlapped with the economic transition from the protectionist era of Mexico's Import Substitution Industrialization to the

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Washington Consensus that underpinned the neoliberal order. Then relations suffered with the stumbles, falls, and economic disasters of 1976, 1982, 1986, 1994–95. In fact, the destabilizing half-century-long Drug War was born during these tumultuous years, when in 1971, Nixon declared a failed global war on drugs that continues to haunt the U.S.–Mexico relationship to this day.

The ascending War on Drugs overlapped with the transition from the New Deal order to the neoliberal order, and this meant more confusion and chaos for the relationship. Relations entered a serious crisis in the 1980s, with its lowest point being the murder of Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, singled out by U.S.–Mexico experts as one of the most sensitive moments in the relationship when Mexico and the United States became "distant neighbors." Confusion over economic policy became the new normal during those years. U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Jim Jones described President Carlos Salinas de Gortari "as having one foot in the old system and one foot in the new system, and you never knew which foot was where" (Estévez, 2012: 11). Jimmy Carter, too, straddled both the old and new economic orders, which partly explains his wild fluctuations in politics, economic policies, and foreign affairs. But the conflicts and frictions of U.S.–Mexico relations during the twentieth century were mild next to the tumultuous relations during the long nineteenth century, from 1820–1910 and during the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920). Bilateral relations pitched and heaved with wars, foreign interventions, revolutions, and civil wars that upended North America throughout extended periods of war, chaos, and instability, particularly from 1821 to the 1870s.

U.S.–Mexico relations have enjoyed a period of prolonged peace marked by stable integration. The process began before the Second World War and became consolidated by the mid-twentieth century, but integration accelerated in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The level of integration we see today between both nations is unprecedented. If you take a closer look at the twentieth century, and particularly at the past 40 years, you see the relationship becoming more intimate as social, cultural, and economic convergence in North America continues to strengthen the ties between both nations. In the words of Andrew Selee, both countries went from being "distant neighbors," as journalist Alan Riding described the relationship during the pre-NAFTA years in the 1980s, to being "intimate strangers," "deeply connected to each other yet with few of the tools we need to understand our growing intimacy" (Selee, 2018: 42-44).

Trump's presidential campaign in 2016, and his aggressive rhetoric against Mexico and Mexicans upended 40 years of friendly relations that had been built on an even older history of consensus politics and collaboration dating back to the Good Neighbor Policy years before the Second World War. Today, heightened geopolitical

tensions at an international level have affected bilateral relations, and difficult conditions continue to ripen as we approach the 2024 presidential elections in both Mexico and the United States.

There's nothing new under the sun when it comes to the violent rhetoric and the politics of rage and revenge that Donald J Trump, Trumpism, and the far-right MAGA movement represent with all the trappings of illiberalism. But what is certainly new about Trumpism is that the movement has adopted a new form of racial nationalism that promotes an aggressive foreign policy toward Mexico. Tensions have only been made worse by open calls from the Republican mainstream to invade Mexico, with the outlandish idea becoming a litmus test for the Republican field in the primaries. The new foreign policy has completely taken hold of the GOP establishment as Mexico becomes the foil for a new form of jingoism taking shape in the popular bases of the GOP. By energizing their electoral base, the GOP has toyed with two fantasies that hark back to the nineteenth century: the fantasy of invading Mexico and the fantasy of a civil war in the United States. These fantasies have a long record in the history of U.S.–Mexico relations. However, today they float around everywhere in the world of far-right extremism, and at least one of them—the fantasy of invading Mexico—has drifted from the hothouse of extremism and found its new home in the mainstream of American politics. Once again, Mexican culture and society find themselves at the heart of right-wing fantasies of political violence.

When the Postwar Liberal Consensus Fell Apart: The Transition from the New Deal Order and the Rise of the New American Right

Political life in the United States "has served again and again as an arena for uncommonly angry minds," wrote historian and public intellectual Richard Hofstadter in 1954, speaking of the angry minds of the New Right that emerged in the 1950s under the Red Scare of McCarthyism (Hofstadter, 2012: xxxvii). For Hofstadter, the New Right of 1954 came disguised as mainstream conservativism; he labelled it the "Pseudo-Conservative Revolt." Supporters of the New Right were often suspicious, angry, paranoid, and fear-driven; they showed signs of "a serious and restless dissatisfaction with American life, traditions, and institutions" (Hofstadter, 2012: 39). They "believe themselves to be conservative, and usually employ the rhetoric of conservatism." But their angry minds could not be more different from the temperate minds of mainstream conservatives, having "little in common with the temperate and compromising spirit of true conservatism in the classical sense of the word" and being

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"far from pleased with the dominant practical conservatism of the moment." Someone from the Pseudo-Conservative Revolt is described as follows:

> … believes himself to be living in a world in which he is spied upon, plotted against, betrayed, and very likely destined for total ruin. He feels that his liberties have been arbitrarily and outrageously invaded. He is opposed to almost everything that has happened in American politics in the past twenty years.... He is disturbed deeply by American participation in the United Nations, which he can see only as a sinister organization. He sees his own country as being so weak that it is constantly about to fall victim to subversion; and yet he feels that it is so all-powerful that any failure it may experience in getting its way in the world … cannot possibly be due to its limitations but must be attributed to its having been betrayed. He is the most bitter of all our citizens about our involvement in the wars of the past, but seems the least concerned about avoiding the next one. (Hofstadter, 2012: 41)

McCarthyism, like a flash in the pan, came and went after its peak in February of 1954, when nearly 46 percent of the population supported Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist crusade and found his Red Scare captivating (Newport, 2014). Then, ten years later, came Barry Goldwater in 1964, and the New Right that Hofstadter had identified a decade earlier was galvanized by the Goldwater presidential campaign of 1964. Goldwater, a senator from Arizona, was an outsider to the Republican Party. He displaced the more moderate, liberal candidate, Nelson Rockefeller, as Goldwater campaigned on the platform of a backwashed McCarthyism. Goldwater was staunchly anti-communist, but also staunchly opposed to the Civil Rights Act. Be it out of conviction or opportunism, Goldwater defended his position against the Civil Rights Act, demagogically, in defense of liberty and justice. "I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice," he warned his popular base on his acceptance speech at the Republican Convention (Goldwater, 1964). "And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue," he added while railing against the Civil Rights Act. Comparing the period between 1954 and 1964, Hofstadter noted that "the Goldwater campaign showed that the ultra-right has grown considerably in organization and influence, if not in numbers, over the past ten years, and the effort to understand it has lost none of its urgency" (Hofstadter, 2012: 62).

Much to Hofstadter's relief, Goldwater eventually went on to lose against Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 presidential campaign. Hofstadter was a postwar liberal "consensus historian" who adhered to the New Deal order, and like many of his contemporaries, Hofstadter was particularly worried about a new right emerging with a new style of politics that mobilized old resentments and angry minds in the

service of conspiratorial thinking; "how much political leverage can be got out of the animosities and passions of a small minority," he asked himself as he wrote his famous work *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* that would win the Pulitzer Prize that same year.

This is not the first or last time that *Paranoid Style* is invoked to explain Donald Trump. The Library of America put together an excellent panel of renowned historians who reaffirmed Hofstadter's validity and present urgency. It is the "paranoid style" that won Trump the presidency in 2016 (LOA, 2020). Nor is this the first time that Hofstadter has been invoked to attack intellectual liberal elites, the status quo, for disparaging the hard cries of the "silent majority." Hofstadter's essay has most recently come under attack for representing what one commentator put it as the "smug style in American liberalism" (Rensin, 2016). Moreover, belaboring in Hofstadter's analysis carries the danger of engaging in psychobabble to explain complex political change. As Hofstadter himself recognized later, his previous essay on the pseudo-conservative revolt had "overstressed clinical findings" in these angry minds, an approach very much in vogue at the time with Adorno's evaluation of the authoritarian mind. Yet one has to understand that many of the postwar liberal consensus thinkers, historians and social scientists like Daniel Bell (2017), Seymour Martin Lipset, Arthur Schlessinger, or Hofstadter himself, had identified a movement fed by different, new and old, right-wing strands of populism, isolationism, and illiberalism, that attacked the postwar liberal consensus (Heale, 2017).

What is most important about Richard Hofstadter, besides his acute, prescient, and relevant comments on past social fervors, is his lifelong battle against the rise of the New Right, and his equally vehement defense of the postwar liberal consensus, which collapsed in the final years of his life and career in the 1960s and 1970s. Richard Hofstadter is one of the most illustrative examples of the beleaguered politics of consensus history when it began to unravel. The process began in the 1960s, when Hofstadter published *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*.

The postwar liberal consensus, like any other political consensus, had been built on a long-lasting social and economic order: the New Deal order that emerged in the 1930s. In his book *America in Our Time*, journalist Godfrey Hodgson first spoke of this liberal consensus as a conceptual tool to reinterpret the postwar era in the United States. He clearly defined a period that was markedly different from its predecessors, the Progressive and Depression eras. Hodgson's argued that there was a "liberal consensus" that gave direction to economic policy, foreign affairs, public policy, party politics, institutions, and the general mood and political debate. Those who supported the postwar liberal consensus, Hodgson writes, were "confident to the verge of complacency about the perfectibility of American society, anxious to the point of

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paranoia about the threat of communism—those were the two faces of the consensus mood" (Hodgson, 2005: 75). Hodgson identified the heyday of the liberal consensus to be the mid-twentieth century, from 1955 to 1963, namely, from the downfall of Senator Joseph McCarthy to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. This revision of American politics also informed many scholars and intellectuals seeking to explain the roots of socio-political upheaval that shook the United States in the later part of the 1960s. In fact, the 1964 Presidential campaign is sometimes explained as the Sunbelt revolt from Arizona and Texas. The Sunbelt had long established itself as a bastion against the New Deal, so it was through the Sunbelt that both Goldwater and Lyndon Johnson expressed their dissatisfaction with the current order and political consensus.

When Hofstadter died in 1970, the New Deal order was in serious trouble. The year of 1970 heralded a new age, what Daniel T. Rodgers calls the "Age of Fracture" (Rodgers, 2012), when those sectors that had been excluded from the postwar liberal consensus came back with a vengeance to haunt the New Deal order. The political order stumbled as it confronted the powerful right-wing backlash following the social liberation of the long 1960s, then faced the worst years of the Vietnam War, the oil shock of 1973, and the cycles of stagflation.

It took nearly twenty years for the New Deal order to finally collapse. The late 1960s and 1970s saw the reemergence of a new illiberal hard right that revolved around segregationist policies, racial ideologies, moral panics, and the "great awakenings" of religious sectors in society. Most important was the role of George Wallace in transforming the political landscape with his segregationist platform, especially during the presidential elections of 1968, when Wallace competed for the presidency with the American Independent Party. Historian Dan T. Carter sees Wallace's "politics of rage" as having a lasting influence on American politics.

> Although George Wallace's role in today's conservative resurgence has been unduly neglected by historians, the four-time Alabama governor and four-time presidential candidate did not create a conservative resurgence in American politics. But Wallace, more than any other political figure of the 1960s and early 1970s, sensed the frustrations— the rage— of many American voters, made commonplace a new level of political incivility and intemperate rhetoric, and focused that anger upon a convenient set of scapegoats. (Carter, 1996b: 3-26)

The New Deal order eventually collapsed in 1981 with the election of Ronald Reagan, and by the time the United States entered the Reagan Conservative Revolution, The New Deal order, and everything that it represented, "had expired in a hail of outmoded nostrums, estranged constituencies, and bumbling standard-bearers" (Kazin,

1995: 246). If it took more than two decades for the New Deal order to decline and finally collapse, you would expect the current neoliberal order, based on the Washington Consensus, to take as long to decline and fall. In the meantime, we are left with the symptoms of its decline.

U.S.–Mexico Relations and the Triad of Far-Right Politics in the United States: The History of Populism, Illiberalism, and Isolationism

To understand the nature of the American far right, three traditions in American politics must be explored: populism, illiberalism, and isolationism. All three are incredibly difficult terms to define. But all three have come together in odd mixtures to define the contours of present-day Trumpism and the MAGA movement, which has set the Republican Party on a course of dangerous radicalization.

U.S.–Mexico Relations and American Populism

Trump's populist language is not new. As one commentator put it, somewhat simplistically, Trump was Pat Buchannan but with a better sense of timing for politics. Buchanan, the political firebrand who vied for the presidency in 1992, 1996, and 2000, warned that "we must not trade in our sovereignty for a cushioned seat at the head table of anyone's new world order." He railed against the effects of globalization, proclaiming that "our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations, not dumped onto some landfill called multiculturalism" (Greenfield, 2016).

Populism is a highly contested concept, and nowadays the political phenomenon seems to manifest itself everywhere and nowhere at once. Populism has been defined as a style of politics that promotes a contrast between "the people" versus "the elite" or the establishment, often adopting the language of the virtuous majority against the corruption of an elite system. Populism has taken different forms at different times in the political history of the United States. It first emerged in the late nineteenth century, and henceforward it has been defined as the populist tradition of the 1880s and 1890s. The People's Party brought together a coalition of anti-monopolists, labor unionists, temperance supporters, and farmers, in a reformation movement that put forth a great deal of demands—regulation of corporations and local democratic representation—that were eventually passed during the later years of the Progressive Era (1890–1920) (Postel, 2009).

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Right-wing populism also has a long record of bursting onto the scene of American politics during moments of transition in the twentieth century. It flourished during the Prohibitionist Crusade and the Catholic Populism of Father Coughlin in the 1930s. Then reemerged and took over sectors of the South that voted for George Wallace in 1968 and 1972; then resurfaced with the Christian Coalition of the 1990s under Pat Robertson, followed by the populist revolt of Buchanan in 1992. In the wake of the Great Recession (2008–2009), the appeal was mainly economic, and right-wing populism found a new expression in the Tea Party Movement.

So how can Trumpism be explained from the perspective of a long-standing populist tradition in American politics? Gerstle identifies two powerful and contradictory ideals that have decisively shaped the history of the American nation in the twentieth century—civic nationalism and racial nationalism. Both civic and racial nationalism have profoundly shaped the long-tangled thread of populism in American politics, spanning from the People's Party of William J. Bryan in the 1890s to the MAGA movement of Donald J. Trump, and Bernie Sanders, today. To define these two terms, from the sweeping perspective of American political history in the twentieth century, Gerstle poses an inescapable question about the changing and often conflicting ideas about the fundamental nature of American society: "Is the United States a social melting pot, as our civic creed warrants, or is full citizenship somehow reserved for those who are white and of the "right" ancestry?" (Gerstle, 2017a). This is the question that goes to the crux of modern-day questions of migration and belonging in the current American polity.

Historians of American populism have identified the MAGA movement as one of the strands of racial nationalism that have fueled populist revolts in the past. Michael Kazin sees the language of today's conservative populism as very similar to those of the populist Workingmen's Party that emerged in California in the 1870s prior to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The Workingmen's Party attacked the top and the bottom, pointing out an unwritten pact between the elite and immigrants to squeeze out the deserving and middle. They attacked immigrants and big business with equal vehemence. They singled out Chinese immigrants and railroad tycoons for conspiring against the common people, becoming famous for their slogan "The Chinese must go!"

Today's populists carry much of the vices and very few of the virtues of their predecessors in the 1890s. Trump's populists privilege an exclusionary form of racial nationalism that rejects other forms of inclusion through citizenship and belonging. They engage in the paranoid style and conspiratorial thinking identified by Hofstadter, defending Western and Judeo-Christian civilization against a great world conspiracy seeking to subvert it. Along these lines, Trump delivered a speech in

Poland, when he was president in 2017. The speech was drafted by Trump's staunch anti-immigrant advisor, Stephen Miller, who neatly illustrates the core tenets of racial nationalism:

> The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive. Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert it and destroy it? (2017)

Trump has shored up his base with appeals to exclusionary ideas of racial nationalism (sometimes referred to as ethno-nationalism or white Christian nationalism, but these terms are more contested and bring more confusion to the debate). Trump's Proud Boys defined themselves as "Western Chauvinists," armed and ready to defend their ethnocentric vision of Western civilization. Trump has singled out refugees and immigrants who they see as outsiders. He has been particularly virulent against Muslim and Mexican immigrants, and against refugees who come from what he disparagingly called "Third World shitholes." In a speech in Ohio, he described immigrants as snakes, then dismantled the refugee system in the United States. He created the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement (VOICE) Office that was established as a government agency within the Department of Homeland Security. He has used dehumanizing language to attack undocumented migrants for "poisoning the blood of our country."

U.S.–Mexico Relations and American Illiberalism

In American politics, powerful currents of illiberalism have run alongside populist movements. But if the term populism is difficult to define, illiberalism is even more so. Illiberalism is a very slippery concept. The term originated in the field of political science and comparative politics, and it has been used to define different forms of authoritarian systems and ideologies. The concept was then picked up by the media and think tanks, defined with insufficient rigor, and echoed repeatedly like a broken record. Recently, however, illiberalism has returned to academia and is now the topic of investigation. Theorists, social scientists, and historians have recently focused on the history and politics of illiberalism and its different manifestations in the United States. Most noticeably among them are public policy specialist Thomas J. Main and historian Steven Hahn, who have begun to explore this tradition in American political culture.

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Illiberalism has to be defined negatively in opposition to liberalism. But that does not mean that anything opposed to liberalism is illiberal. Conservatism is not illiberalism. According to Thomas Main, illiberalism has been defined as the rejection of any of the essential political principles of liberal democracy in the United States (Main, 2021). It is a rejection of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, a rejection of human rights, political equality, electoral democracy, the rule of law, and a political culture based on tolerance.

Illiberalism carries weight when studied in its specific context in the history of American politics, for instance, during the 1920s–1930s and the 1960s–1970s. Steven Hahn explores these periods in his forthcoming book on American illiberalism. He "reframes the American past by uncovering a powerful illiberalism as deep-seated and motivating as the founding ideals," identifying recurring episodes of racial, religious, and ethnic violence and expulsion. Illiberalism can manifest locally. Deep suspicion of outsiders, including the federal democratic government, has bred forms of vigilantism and lynching that prioritize exclusionary community values over individual and minority rights, and hierarchy over multiracial democracy. Driven by popular movements, courts, and legislation, Hahn notes, illiberalism has long been embedded in everyday life and popular ideas, from "theories of racial inequality and eugenics to birth control advocacy in ethnic communities … here is America's unexceptional history, its founding ideals in ongoing tension with illiberal beliefs" (Hahn, 2024).

One of the tenets of illiberalism is that all men are not created equal; that politics is war, or (in a twisted reinterpretation of Clausewitz's theory of war) that war is an extension of politics that must be pursued at all costs. War is the sole objective: "We want to cross the Rubicon. We want total war. We must be prepared to do battle in every arena. In the media. In the courtroom. At the ballot box. And in the streets," New York Young Republican Club President Gavin Wax declared at the organization's gala (Corke, 2023). In this worldview, adversaries become enemies, and opponents traitors. The strategy is not to debate and persuade, but to attack and eliminate the adversary. On Veteran's Day in November 2023, Trump warned in an infamous speech in New Hampshire that "the threat from outside forces is far less sinister, dangerous and grave than the threat from within," and he vowed to "root out the communists, Marxists, fascists and the radical left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country, that lie and steal and cheat on elections" (LeVine, 2023).

One enduring outcome of the 1960s, Hahn notes, was the illiberalism that George Wallace made politically mainstream. But the problem is that Trump has gone further. Trump mainstreamed deep undercurrents of illiberalism, similar to George Wallace in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet Trump made the extreme mainstream not from the powerful

loudspeaker of a governorship or a three-round failed presidential campaign like Wallace did, but from the all-embracing megaphone of his 2016–2020 presidency and his presidential campaigns in 2016 and 2020, and now 2024.

Since the 1990s, with the rise of social media and mass means of communication in the digital age, many research centers like the Anti-Defamation League or the Southern Poverty Law Center have studied how illiberal platforms have boomed, with their echo chambers reaching ever-wider audiences in American society. The fortunes of extremist platforms like The Daily Stormer, Breitbart News, or Infowars, and the fortunes of extremist commentators like Anne Coulter, Tucker Carlson, Steve Bannon, Jared Taylor, among countless others, turned around in the new millennium, and they became successful at reaching a mass audience like none of their predecessors could have ever imagined.

Mass communication for extremist audiences is partly behind the entire GOP establishment fully embracing a new form of Gunboat Diplomacy for the twenty-first century, which has been communicated with increasing verbal violence towards Mexico. Five years was all it took for the hate toward Mexico to move from the hothouse of extremism to the political mainstream—from building a border wall to promoting an invasion. Illiberalism-gone-mainstream went from Ann Coulter fantasizing about North Korea dropping a nuclear missile in Tijuana; to a lone-wolf sheriff in Ohio dreaming about dropping "the mother of all bombs" on Mexican cartels (Bernal, 2017); to many GOP legislators calling for an invasion with Senator Lindsey Graham toying with the idea of declaring Mexico an enemy of the United States, and Tucker Carlson arguing how Mexico is a "menace" greater than that of Putin's Russia; to DeSantis proposing a naval blockade and Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana seeking to arm-twist Mexico into accepting an invasion by using U.S. economic leverage and weaponizing Mexico's economic dependencies. "Without the people of America, Mexico … would be eating cat food out of a can and living in a tent behind an outback," the Senator added (Rawnsley et al., 2023). Attacking Mexico and Mexican communities in the United States has become an important component of today's mainstream illiberalism.

U.S.–Mexico relations are now in the crosshairs of warmongering rhetoric and fantasies of political violence. But beyond the 2024 electoral cycle and the campaign rhetoric, there is a deeper history of aggression fueled by powerful streaks of militarism, nativism, and illiberalism that are as old in U.S.–Mexico relations as the founding ideals that have shaped the Mexican and American nations. The nineteenth century was full of those moments when anti-Mexican sentiments flared up, especially during times of a war like the Mexican–American War (1846–1848), or during times of turmoil and revolution in the twentieth century. From La Matanza of the 1910s and

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1920s to El Paso shooting in 2019, anti-Mexican sentiments have become entangled with American manifestations of jingoism, nativist fevers, and real acts of military aggression against Mexico in the past.

The 2019 El Paso massacre is a tragic reminder of the real-world consequences of hate-fueled rhetoric and extremism, a trend that continues to grow in the United States. The mass shooting claimed the lives of 23 individuals, primarily Latinos and Mexican Americans, including eight Mexican nationals. The shooter's manifesto revealed a dangerous blend of anti-Mexican sentiments and conspiracy theories, reflecting a disturbing trend of racially-motivated violent extremism that glorifies "leaderless resistance" as an individual strategy through which collective but atomized collective violent actions are channeled and organized (Malone et al., 2022). In his manifesto, the shooter explicitly referred to an "invasion" of immigrants, invoking conspiracy theories like the Great Replacement Theory to provide urgency and justification for his actions. But most dangerously, the shooter echoed the language of Trumpism, of some TV anchors at Fox News, and of extreme MAGA politicians within the GOP who have embraced a similar rhetoric.

Addressing domestic extremism has become a top priority for the U.S. government. The scale of far-right violence has risen significantly in recent years, with far-right terrorist attacks and plots comprising over half of all terrorist incidents in the United States nearly every year since 2011, according to data collected by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). The violent storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 is one of the most evident examples of collective action by domestic extremists in the nation's recent history. Even though the 2022 midterm elections saw a rejection of many extreme candidates, the country continues to be in a reactionary political phase, driven in part by a political and social backlash against perceived progressive victories. "That backlash has kicked up a swarm of conspiracy theories and racist tropes," wrote an expert on extremism at the Southern Poverty Law Center; extremist ideas which now circulate "widely among influential right-wing figures and within the Republican Party, which lends them legitimacy and allows them to influence policy" (Corke, 2023). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's October 2020 Homeland Threat Assessment report ranked domestic violent extremism as the most severe terrorist threat to the country, surpassing the danger posed by foreign terrorist organizations. The assessment in March 2021 reaffirmed that racially-motivated violent extremists and militia groups are particularly potent threats.

However, the El Paso shooting was not new for Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrant communities in South Texas, who have suffered decades of discrimination and aggression. Borderlands history and the history of U.S.–Mexico relations recounts a long-standing record of racially and ethnically-motivated hate campaigns

and anti-Mexican violence, particularly in the borderlands in California, Texas, and the Southwest, dating back to the early nineteenth century. In fact, the shooting at El Paso was exactly the kind of violence that many Mexican descendants of victims of a 1915 massacre in South Texas had been warning us about. Anti-Mexican violence runs deep in the history of the borderlands shared between Mexico and the United States.

There is a historical link between these bouts of borderland violence and rising tensions in the bilateral relation. The tragedy of El Paso took place in the context of rising extremism in the form of nativist, anti-immigrant fervor in the United States, and rising turmoil and violence from the security crisis in Mexico. The history of bilateral conflicts has been punctuated by two major U.S. military interventions of Mexico: one during the Mexican–American War (1846–1848), the other during the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920). Alongside this history of military aggression, large-scale anti-Mexican violence has flared up: during times of war, like the massacres committed during the Mexican–American War, or during times of turmoil and revolution in the twentieth century, when the United States intervened militarily in 1914, and then led a "Punitive Expedition" in 1916–1917. Vigilantes and law enforcement, including the Texas Rangers, killed hundreds of Mexican residents between 1910 and 1920 during an infamous period of anti-Mexican violence called La Matanza (Muñoz, 2018).

Historical moments like La Matanza reveal the entanglement of violence and anti-Mexican sentiments with different forms of U.S. jingoism, warmongering, militarism, and nativist fervor. These pulses drove past incidents of large-scale violence against Mexican communities in the United States and real acts of historic military aggression against Mexico, pulses which are often born out of the deep-rooted foreign policy strands of isolationism.

Isolationism: U.S.–Mexico Relations and America First Movements

America First has come to define Donald Trump's immigration policies, his protectionist politics of economic nationalism, and his attempts to renegotiate NAFTA and other trade deals. But most recently, America First has come to represent yet another strand of isolationism that has shaped foreign policy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the idea of "fortress America," a form of isolationism that promotes restraint in foreign wars in Europe and Asia, and aggressively promotes involvement in the Western Hemisphere, and particularly in Mexico, Central America, and

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the Circum-Caribbean. This is not the first time that the United States has been gripped by an America First movement. It was originally voiced by the anti-Catholic, nativist American Party, the "Know Nothings" of the 1850s, whose members identified themselves with nativism, protectionism, and isolationism. As one of its most ardent supporters put it in a speech: "I go for America first, last and always" (Churchwell, 2022).

In the twentieth century, the original cry came from an unexpected source who turned America First into a political catchphrase. President Woodrow Wilson used the phrase in 1915 when delivering a speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution. Wilson promised he would keep the United States out of World War I. "In foreign affairs," notes historian Andrew Preston, "it couldn't be more ironic that the originator of the slogan America First is the father of liberal internationalism himself, Woodrow Wilson" (Leffler et al., 2018: 33–51). When Wilson gave his campaign speech, his objectives were to adopt neutrality and steer clear of total war in Europe and Asia, and not to announce a new foreign policy. But then Wilson joined the First World War in the spring of 1917, and the foreign policy establishment changed radically. America First was then used by Wilson's opponents to expose his contradictions and attack his decision to join the Great War.

Most prominent among Wilson's critics was the businessman and media tycoon William Randolph Hearst. Hearst became "a war hawk in Cuba and Mexico, but a pacifist in Europe." He pressured Wilson to pursue military intervention in Mexico. Soon after President Wilson was inaugurated, Hearst began petitioning Wilson to intervene in Mexico. "There is only one course [to] pursue," he wrote in November 1913 as the Mexican Revolution deepened. "That course is to occupy Mexico and restore it to a state of civilization by means of American men and American methods." Hearst would then attack Wilson for providing European allies, and in particular Great Britain, with any wartime assistance that could sap the resources of the United States and leave it defenseless vis-à-vis Asia.

> In these circumstances of uncertainty … there is only one possible course that is sensible, and that is to keep every dollar and every man and every weapon and all our supplies and stores at home, for the defense of our own land, our own people, our own freedom, until that defense has been made absolutely secure. After that we can think of other nations' troubles. But till then, America first!" (Nasaw, 2000: xiii, 229, 260)

America First came to be identified as a slogan lobbed against a type of foreign policy that came to be known as Wilsonian internationalism, which is seen as the policy precursor of today's slippery phrase "liberal internationalism."

The idea of America First revived during the interwar period at the onset of the Second World War with the America First Committee, which was founded in 1940. The isolationist movement sprouted when England was on the verge of defeat in 1940–1941. It brought together a broad-church coalition of farmers, business leaders, socialists, activists, pacifists opposing "any increase in supplies to England beyond the limitations of cash and carry," because such a policy "would imperil American strength and lead to active American intervention in Europe." The movement continued to thrive as total war raged in Europe and Asia, growing despite news of the fall of France in 1940 and despite the increasing likelihood of England's defeat. One of the committee's founders explained the mission of America First in a speech delivered to the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs in 1940.

> There are two schools of thought in this country on the subject of our foreign policy. They may be termed "Interventionists" and "Isolationists." These terms are not exactly descriptive, because all interventionists are not extreme interventionists and most isolationists are only isolationists as to Europe and Asia, but not isolationists as to the balance of North America and South America …. Americans like myself feel that our true mission is in North America and South America. We stand today in an unrivalled position. With our resources and organizing ability we can develop, with our Canadian friends, an only partially developed continent like North America and a virgin continent like South America. The reorganization and proper development of Mexico alone would afford an outlet for our capital and energies for some time to come. And while I think we should try in every way to maintain the friendship of our neighbors to the South, I think we should also make it clearly understood that no government in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean South American countries will be tolerated unless it is friendly to the United States and that, if necessary, we are prepared to use force to attain that object. (Wood, 1940: 130–33)

The type of isolationism that Robert Wood and the First America Committee promoted was an updated version of the Monroe Doctrine and the [Teddy] Roosevelt Corollary of 1904. This updated version sought to question the basic premises of the Good Neighbor Policy with Mexico and the hemisphere espoused by FDR after 1933.

As time went by, the America First Committee began to sour and become more extreme. One of the voices who emerged from this new turn was the long-distance pilot Charles Lindbergh, who became a celebrity when he successfully crossed the Atlantic in 1927. He married and had children, but their lives soon took a tragic turn when their two-year-old son was kidnapped and murdered, and Lindbergh and his wife fled to take refuge in Europe. Lindbergh was received as a celebrity in Nazi Germany as he cozied up to Germany's increasingly totalitarian regime. When Lindbergh returned

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to the U.S. and took over the megaphone of the America First Committee, he lambasted Jewish Americans and accused them of peddling their money to influence the Roosevelt administration to get involved in the war. On September 11, 1941, at an infamous America First speech, Lindbergh lampooned the Jewish, Great Britain, and the Roosevelt administration, painting them as warmongers and agitators who plotted to drag the United States into another war in Europe. The America First Committee had become a nativist rallying cry voiced by American supporters of European fascism, and the committee "passed into public memory as a right-wing, hyper-nationalist, racist organization with serious ties to fascist and pro-Nazi movements" (Leffler and Hitchcok, 2018: 33–51).

During the twentieth century, isolationism and illiberalism came intermixed in the life and times of two extremely important U.S. ambassadors to Mexico—Dwight Morrow, 1927–1930, and Josephus Daniels, 1933–1941— who were fundamental actors in strengthening relations between the United States and Mexico. Dwight and Morrow helped negotiate very difficult post-revolutionary issues in the relationship: issues of religion, land redistribution, and oil. Both Morrow and Daniels had very strong connections to deep-rooted strands of isolationism and illiberalism in the United States. Morrow had strong family connections with one of the most important promoters of isolationism and European fascism in the United States; Charles Lindbergh was Morrow's son-in-law. Both Lindbergh and his wife, Anne Morrow, visited Mexico and Cuernavaca when Dwight Morrow was the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, 1927–1930. Josephus Daniels was involved in the 1898 Wilmington coup, insurrection, and massacre of black communities, one of the most infamous chapters in the history of the rise of white supremacy in the United States in the late nineteenth century (Zucchino, 2020).

But even these two ambassadors, whose life and trajectory had been defined by their cozy relationship with segregationists, isolationists, and white supremacists, were able to reinvent themselves when exposed to the diplomatic relationship between Mexico and the United States, a relationship that was completely redefined in friendly terms when total war finally struck Europe and Asia, and the United States was eventually dragged into the Second World War. Morrow and Daniels isolated the relationship from these illiberal currents and became the most assiduous promoters of healthy and friendly U.S.–Mexico relations. Morrow assisted in the transition from the inertia of Gunboat and Dollar Diplomacy to the Good Neighbor policy, and Daniels helped consolidate the Good Neighbor policy during FDR's administration. Daniels was part of the progressive movement behind FDR's new policy, promoting a peaceful, friendly relationship with a shared geopolitical ground between Cárdenas and Roosevelt vis-à-vis the Second World War. Daniel's consolidation of

the Good Neighbor policy had one of the most enduring legacies in Mexico, more so than in any other Latin American country. As Erik Zolov notes, Mexico remained the "last good neighbor," with considerable independence to chart its own diplomacy and inter-American projects in the hemisphere (notably among them the 1969 Tlatelolco Treaty) during the long 1960s (Zolov, 2020). The last good neighbor remained standing even after the U.S. government took a more menacing role and veered towards militarism in the region when American navy troops landed in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and began to promote military coups in many countries in Latin America.

In today's American imagination of the far right, the modern-day border with Mexico breeds extremism and isolationism. Greg Grandin argues that American extremism has always flowed from the border:

> If the United States was made by its frontier … today it is being unmade by its border. The escape valve of frontier of colonization, Turner's "gate of escape" has been slammed shut by endless unwinnable wars; deepening political inequality; a venal, arrogant ruling class …. Trumpism is extremism turned inward, all-consuming and self-devouring. There is no "divine, messianic" crusade that can harness and redirect passions outward. Expansion, in any form, can no longer satisfy the interests, reconcile the contradictions, dilute the factions, or redirect the anger. (Grandin, 2019a; Grandin, 2019b: 7-8)

September 9/11 reinvigorated the idea of "fortress America" with the creation of a securitized border and immigration policy promoted by George W. Bush's neoconservative administration. Analysts have mistakenly understood Trump's attack on foreign policy in the Middle East as a sign of pacifism or an anti-war movement. In this sense, Trump does share a common ground with different sectors of society, from the progressive left to the antimilitarists, from the big tents of pacifism to supporters of military restraint in foreign policy who come from all ideological shades and political figures, from the right-wing libertarianism of Rand Paul to the democratic socialism of Bernie Sanders. But Trump's attack on the foreign policy establishment was merely an electoral strategy. The United States continues to be shaped by a huge military-industrial complex, with billions of dollars in military spending. Rural areas that voted for Trump, particularly in the South, are deeply involved in a socialized militarism that has become the popular base of the new MAGA right.

During the 2016 campaign, Trump tapped into the isolationist movement to attack the current foreign policy establishment and the defenders of the liberal international order that emerged after the Cold War. He attacked the "forever wars" in the Middle East. "We are ending the era of endless wars." U.S. forces should not be

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solving "ancient conflicts in faraway lands that many people have not even heard of," Trump said in the summer of 2020 (Holland, 2020). Nowadays, some of his most ardent supporters have embraced an isolationist rhetoric vis-à-vis aid to Ukraine to defend against Russia's brutal invasion. "The only border [Democrats] care about is Ukraine, not America's southern border," said Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene with the intention of shoring up popular support after the mid-term defeat of MAGA candidates. "They don't care about our border or our people …. Under Republicans, not another penny will go to Ukraine," Taylor Greene said at a Trump rally in Iowa in November of 2022. "Our country comes first" (Habeshian, 2022).

She later floated the following idea:

> Our military should be stationed at our southern border. We should strategically strike and take out the Mexican cartels, not the Mexican government or their people, but the Mexican cartels which control them all. Our military is competent and should take them out swiftly. Make an example out of these monsters. The only difference between the cartels and ISIS is that the cartels are on our southern border.

U.S.–Mexico Relations Today: Back to the Future?

U.S.–Mexico relations seem to be playing out on a split screen: with one side projecting one of the worst crises, the lowest point in the relationship not seen since the 1980s, and the other projecting further North American integration, even heralding today's North American moment as the heyday of integration.

For nearly three decades now, economic integration has been the grand strategy pursued by both the United States and Mexico. After the successful renegotiation of NAFTA and the inauguration of the USMCA, the future seems promising for North America with new trends like nearshoring, the upcoming 2026 North American World Cup, and the first review of the USMCA standing as bright moments ahead for the bilateral relationship. Ever since NAFTA went into force, North American economic integration, geopolitical convergence, and shared security goals have shaped the bilateral agenda, and Mexico and the United States continue to channel their differences through a highly institutionalized and integrated relationship. Deepening integration—social, cultural, and economic integration—means greater interdependence, which makes the use of force, military conflict, or intervention less likely. Throughout the twentieth century, cold wars, hot wars, and total wars in Asia and Europe have redefined the relationship between Mexico and the United States. Despite irritants and disagreements, Mexico and the United States confronted the Second World

War and the Cold War jointly. The historical record shows that U.S.–Mexico relations have been an indirect beneficiary of total war in Europe and Asia. But the relationship has suffered during those moments of isolationist indecision when U.S. direct involvement in global wars is hotly debated at home.

Moreover, complacency and excessive confidence in economic integration during times of political turmoil and during transitions from one international order to another are very dangerous moments. At such junctures, major geopolitical players—failing to see the limits of their own power—often make rash decisions by greatly underestimating the intricate complexity and reality of the geopolitical landscape. This was evident when Vladimir Putin—with his invasion of Ukraine—gravely overestimated Russia's power and Ukraine's weakness. Speaking of the U.S.–China relationship, *The Economist* editor-in-chief reminded her audience of a book by Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion,* published in 1910, a few years before the onset of the Great War in 1914 (Angell, 2015). Angell was particularly concerned about the arms race for naval supremacy between Germany and England, and seeing how integrated both countries were, he made his case for peace based on interconnected trade and cultural ties, and reminded his readers that war would inflict immense damage on Europe's interconnected economies. He argued that the economies of Europe were so integrated that war was nearly impossible. Soon enough, Angell was proved wrong, though his defense of peace through trade and economic integration was eventually validated (Whyte, 2015; Minton Beddoes, 2023).

The possibility of a long, costly, protracted, and inconclusive war over Ukraine between NATO and Russia may well deepen isolationist calls to focus on issues at home and disengage from endless wars in faraway places in Europe, Asia, and Africa. This is already happening; GOP debates during the primaries were split by isolationists and internationalists. Some, like Vivek Ramaswamy and Trump, attacked the Biden administration's involvement in Ukraine, while others like Nikki Haley and Mike Pence celebrated the administration's multilateral support and financial and military aid to Ukraine. But there is an emerging consensus on three major foreign policy issues: to focus on migration and the Drug War in Mexico, reaffirm the United States' unwavering support to Israel in the Hamas-Israel conflict, and ratchet up the economic and geopolitical pressure on the rivaling superpower, China.

The replacement of one foreign policy consensus does not happen overnight. The most dangerous scenario would be a bipartisan consensus forming around the idea of using military force in Mexico as a new policy—a modern iteration of the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt's gunboat diplomacy—to deal with the War on Drugs; or a unilateral invasion, preceded by attempts to arm-twist Mexico economically to accept the deployment of joint military forces in Mexican territory. All of this could

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unfold in the wake of a deeper rift, a constitutional breakdown fracturing the United States' beleaguered political system after the 2024 elections. But forecasting in the historical profession leads nowhere, and I have already inflicted enough damage by invoking historical explanations to explain the present. So I leave these matters for policymakers and grand strategists.

Ever since invading Mexico became mainstream in the political discourse, an aggressive foreign policy against Mexico starts to materialize in think tank policy recommendations that are intended to inform policy decisions for GOP presidential candidates, with a particular focus on the prospective presidency of Trump, 2024–2028. This is the case of the 2025 Presidential Transition Project elaborated by the Heritage Foundation, the nearly 900-page doorstopper, "Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise."

The fracture in diverging foreign policy proposals for U.S.–Mexico relations is already underway. Recently, a conservative U.S.–Mexico policy coalition of pro-Trump think tanks released a statement on U.S.–Mexico relations warning that "the old policy consensus that undergirded NAFTA, USMCA, and a generation of cooperative and friendly U.S.–Mexico relations has collapsed," and that, "sadly, the Mexican government is no longer an ally to the United States and can no longer properly be described as a partner." The situation is exacerbated by rising bilateral tensions that are boiling over a complicated scenario that involves Mexican cartels and drug smuggling into the U.S., arms smuggling into Mexico, the growing violence in Mexico and the opioid crisis in the United States, and the broader public health and security crisis created by new cartels dealing with new synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

In June 2023, House Representative Joaquín Castro (D-TX 20th District) sounded a warning signal along these lines to the attendees at the 9th Border Conference, "Building a Competitive U.S.–Mexico Border," held at the Mexico Institute of the Wilson Center. Castro noted how many of his colleagues, leading Republicans from across the ideological spectrum, have agreed on taking unilateral U.S. military action in Mexico against the Mexican drug cartels as a response to the fentanyl crisis in the United States. The progressive wing of the Democratic Party, Joaquín Castro, Nydia Velázquez, Jesús "Chuy" García and a handful of representatives are the few politicians who have voiced their concerns about this worrisome trend. They are beginning to act preemptively.

They introduced an amendment to the 2024 Department of Defense appropriations bill, which draws on the War Powers Resolution of 1973 that limits the president's constitutional authority to wage war, thereby imposing new budgetary constraints on the president for waging war on Mexico. This amendment would ensure that the president can no longer use the military budget to wage war in Mexico without congressional authorization (Thakker, 2023).

The damage, however, is done, and the new rift in foreign policy between those supporting military involvement in Mexico and those against it has shifted what political scientists call the "Overton Window," making the unthinkable possible, and the intolerable tolerable. Yet inertia and complacency continue to shape the debate. Biden's administration has continued with the characteristic insouciance that has defined the American foreign policy establishment and its relationship with Mexico since 9/11. Some continue to argue that aggressive political statements are made for a domestic audience, and that much of the outrageous warmongering in the public arena is nowhere near formal policy. Republicans are merely responding to new electoral appetites. A recent poll by *The Economist* showed how the anti-Mexican mood in America's center-right and far-right is hardening, with a YouGov tracking poll showing how nearly 45 percent of Republican voters consider Mexico to be an enemy of the United States (*The Economist*, 2023). As staff writer for *The Atlantic*, David Frum recently wrote, "War with Mexico? It's on the 2024 ballot, at least if you believe the campaign rhetoric of more and more Republican candidates" (2023).

The greatest danger, however, lies in dismissing this confluence of events as mere campaign rhetoric, believing that it will all blow away once the 2024 presidential elections are over. Even worse would be to think that warmongering against Mexico is nothing more than saber-rattling and grandstanding, and that the "growls and snarls" of Republican candidates performing such rhetorical acrobatics will soon calm down, and that once the elections are finally over, the GOP will spring back to its normal temperate foreign policy positions, business as usual. But it could not be more dangerous to see this shift in foreign policy as a lapse of rationality in the heat of electoral campaigns, and not the symptoms of a new era of strained U.S.–Mexico relations taking shape in North America; a new era that brings the relationship back to the future, with the old ghosts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries returning to the twenty-first century, in the new context of deeper regional integration and a chaotic transition between international and economic orders at a global level.

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