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# REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

## ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR US FOREIGN POLICY



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## **SUMMARY**

The 2016 elections in the United States resulted in Republican victories at both state and federal levels. After the years of divided government during the Obama presidency, the current government in the United States presents an excellent opportunity for the Republicans to advance their policies and agenda(s). The majority party status could be more beneficial in domestic politics than in foreign policy, where the president's leeway to act is already wider. A Republican-dominated government does not mean, however, that there will be no dissension over adopted policy positions and lines – a situation which has already become apparent during the first months of President Trump's government. In a situation where there are no wins in domestic politics, the political capital could be turned towards foreign policy. The fact that the president's party holds a majority in Congress may diminish congressional opposition in terms of not passing bills that curb or limit the president's powers in foreign policy matters that concern funding, to mention just one example.

The extent to which the Republicans will be on the same page in different policy issues will be a relevant question for the future, particularly when taking into account the looming 2018 mid-term elections, which exert a particular pressure of their own. Where, when and by whom will the political capital be used? How will different factions within the party work together? And where will the power reside? It has already been discussed whether Trump has moved closer to the Republican "mainstream" in his policies, not necessarily because of party pressure, but because of the political circumstances. The other tendency is that the Republican's will further drift apart in the White House and Congress.

## INTRODUCTION

The 2016 elections in the United States resulted in a Republican majority in both Houses of Congress and in the White House when Donald Trump was elected 45th President of the United States. The disparity between the popular vote and the Electoral College vote aroused concern in the aftermath of the presidential elections. While the president's party lost seats in the presidential election year, the Republicans are currently enjoying a majority party status in the Senate and the House of Representatives.<sup>1</sup> The Republican Party achieved relevant victories at the state level, although in some states more liberal policies were put forward concerning issues such as the minimum wage.<sup>2</sup> After the elections, 33 of the 50 states had GOP (Grand Old Party) governors.<sup>3</sup> Due to the current state of the electoral system, with no sign of a reversal in the Supreme Court's *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission* decision<sup>4</sup> and the adoption of a major campaign reform, Congress will likely continue to reflect the conservative majorities, even though the population as a whole tends in many instances to favour more progressive policies. Gerrymandering and a high degree of incumbent re-election<sup>5</sup> have had a discernible effect on the elections. To this end, outgoing President Obama launched a redistricting project to help the Democrats win elections in the future.<sup>6</sup>

This Working Paper addresses the current political situation in the United States, namely the Republican government and its implications for US foreign policy. The key questions addressed are 1) Is there a consensus concerning the agenda and policy among the Republicans? 2) What kind of impact will the one-party majority in the government have on foreign policy decision-making? 3) What are the discernible factors influencing

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1 The respective numbers in the 115th Congress for the Republicans as of March 2017 in the Senate are 52 to 46 (2 independent caucusing with the Democrats), and 239 to 197 in the House (Source CRS Report for Congress Membership of the 115th Congress: A Profile. Jennifer E. Manning, March 13, 2017). The party lost 6 seats in the House and 2 seats in the Senate in the 2016 elections. See Gerhard Peters, "Seats in Congress Gained or Lost by the President's Party in Presidential Election Years". The American Presidency Project. Ed. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California. 1999–2017. [http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/presidential\\_elections\\_seats.php](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/presidential_elections_seats.php), accessed 30 August.

2 Sahadi, Jeanne. 2016. 4 states just voted to hike their minimum wage. *CNN money*, November 9, 2016. <http://money.cnn.com/2016/11/09/pf/minimum-wage-state-elections/>, accessed 30 August.

3 See [https://ballotpedia.org/Gubernatorial\\_elections\\_2016](https://ballotpedia.org/Gubernatorial_elections_2016), accessed 30 August. In August 2017, West Virginia Governor Jim Justice announced that he is switching parties (from Democrats to Republicans) at Trump rally in the state.

4 The Supreme Court case that ruled how money can be spent in the elections and by whom.

5 See e.g. Cillizza, Chris. People Hate Congress. But most incumbents get re-elected. What gives? *The Fix*, *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2013. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2013/05/09/people-hate-congress-but-most-incumbents-get-re-elected-what-gives/?utm\\_term=.32bb7e96d790](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2013/05/09/people-hate-congress-but-most-incumbents-get-re-elected-what-gives/?utm_term=.32bb7e96d790), accessed 30 August.

6 See e.g. Dove, Edward-Isaac. 2016. Ward picked to lead Obama-Holder redistricting project. *Politico*, 12/28/16. <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/obama-redistricting-kelly-ward-232995>, accessed 30 August.

agenda-setting and policy priorities among the Republicans? 4) How do different factions within the party influence decision-making, and how is this visible in diverging policy issues?

First, the paper briefly introduces the divisions within the party in order to better understand the current Republican government in the United States. The paper will go on to examine the bigger picture vis-à-vis the US political system, namely the checks and balances and the divisions of power. This will provide more detailed information about the opportunities for the Republican government, taking into account the US political system. The focus will subsequently turn to the opportunities the Republicans have to advance their agenda, before switching to the policy issues that possibly divide them. The section preceding the concluding remarks will then examine US foreign policy under the Republican government.

## PARTY DIVISIONS WITHIN THE GOP?

The topical question is how united the government (and the party) is in its actions. As the branches of government are elected separately, both Congress and the president have their own constituencies. Even though the members of Congress and the president share the party platform, their views on policy preferences and actions could differ. Particularly in the House of Representatives, whose members have to face elections every two years, the constituents of a specific congressional district are often reflected in the member's actions. For example, a member of Congress coming from a state where immigration plays a considerable role could decide to vote against funding the Mexico wall. Or to give another example, senators or representatives might be more likely to oppose budget cuts or to support infrastructure if such issues have a direct impact on their own election districts or states.<sup>7</sup>

In simple terms, the tension within the party could be described as moderate versus conservative, or establishment versus anti-establishment. In this context, the House Freedom Caucus representing the conservatives, and the Tuesday Group comprising moderate Republicans, are two examples. In the Senate, established senators and former presidential candidates John McCain and Lindsay Graham have actively taken stands on foreign policy issues and commented on the government's policies, for example in regard to Russia. Senator McCain also has an influential position in the Senate as the Chairman of the Committee on Armed Services.

The Republican control of the presidency and Congress has a certain effect in advancing the domestic Republican agenda due to the legislative majority party coalitions. The implications for foreign policy could remain more limited because the leeway for the president to act is in any case wider. The fact that the president's party holds a majority in Congress may diminish congressional opposition in terms of not passing bills that curb or limit the president's powers in foreign policy funding issues, for example. The one-party majority situation could benefit the president in terms of more or wider powers, as authorized by Congress. A discussion on congressional oversight when the same party controls both the White House and Congress took place, for example, during George W. Bush's presidency. The Republican majority does not rule out the possibility of dissenting voices, however. How will policy positions amongst the Republicans concerning foreign policy and the relationship with Russia, for instance, be played out? In particular, after a bill on Russian sanctions was passed by Congress and signed by the president.

In the 2016 election, the president was not elected on the basis of foreign policy issues. As argued by commentators, the polls indicated that Hillary Clinton was trusted more on these issues and that Americans continue to be supportive of trade and alliances. After the election, Thomas Wright has written that Trump's beliefs and policy of putting America first is supported by only a small part of his administration, who also face opposition from the foreign policy establishment in the US and several Republican members of Congress. The president's support of protectionism and nationalism instead of globalism, free trade and alliances, is seen to resemble 19th-century world politics.

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7 For more on the factors, see Prokop, Andre. 2017. The US Senate will determine whether President Trump succeeds or fails. Vox, Jan. 3, 2017. <http://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/18/13601370/trump-senate-filibuster>, accessed 30 August.

The opposition at home has also been actualized. For example, after Trump spoke over the phone with Malcom Turnbull on prime minister of Australia, congressional leaders made some critical comments in a bipartisan fashion concerning the president's behavior. Moreover, Congress has made a proposal to overrule the possible lifting of Russian sanctions.<sup>8</sup> The bill covering sanctions in relation to North Korea, Iran and Russia was sent to President Trump in July 2017. However, US military actions in Syria under the Trump government were praised by members of both parties. The administration has also engaged Congress. President Trump invited the whole Senate to the White House for a North Korea briefing, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford, and Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats. It seldom happens that the whole Senate receives a briefing.<sup>9</sup>

The divisions within the party and between the White House and Congress should be taken into account, but not necessarily overplayed when analyzing the policy options for the Republicans as a party. The current situation will provide a specific opportunity to advance the Republican Party's agenda, namely to advance conservative or Christian values, budgetary issues, and the idea of small government, to mention just a few topics. The current situation is not unique, however: Republicans enjoyed majority party status at times, for example, during George W. Bush's presidency in 2001–2003, and throughout 2003–2005 when the Republicans held a clear majority in both Houses of Congress.<sup>10</sup> The Republicans have a certain timeframe to realize their agenda before the mid-term elections in 2018. How united the party will be on setting the agenda, and what the implications will be for the US and its foreign policy with the Republican Party controlling both the presidency and Congress are the main focal points of this paper.

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8 See Wright, Thomas. 2017. Trump takes allies back to the 19th century global order. Brookings, March 21 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/03/21/trump-takes-allies-back-to-19th-century-global-order/>, accessed 30 August.

9 See Fox News Politics April 24, 2017. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/04/24/entire-senate-being-called-to-white-house-for-north-korea-briefing.html>, accessed 30 August.

10 In the 107th Congress (2001–2003), the majority party status switched between the parties because of the decisive vote of the vice-president and switching party affiliations and elections. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Republicans held a majority party status by 51 to 48 in the Senate and 229 to 205 in the House. In the 111th Congress (2009–2011), Democrats gained big wins in 2009, but it was also the year of the Tea Party. See party divisions at: <https://www.senate.gov/history/partydiv.htm>, accessed 30 August.

## CHECKS AND BALANCES AND DIVISIONS OF POWER

The Constitution lays the foundation for the powers of the president and Congress. These powers are not static, however, but dependent on political powers, contexts, issues, and the way in which they are understood and defined by different actors. For example, the extent of Commander-in-Chief powers of the president has been a source of debate. The powers of Congress are eminent in terms of legislating, levying taxes, and so on, whereas the powers of the president are highly visible in foreign policy matters, at least nowadays. The branches of government are not completely separate, however, or wholly autonomous. The president can, for example, unilaterally veto congressional legislation (which Congress can overrule with a two-thirds majority) and, through the power of the purse, Congress can play a role in several foreign policy matters. Added to this, the House of Representatives and the Senate have their own enumerated powers. For instance, the Senate should give their advice and consent vis-à-vis US treaties, and also confirm presidential nominations, including Supreme Court justices and cabinet members, not forgetting other department and ambassador appointments.

The Senate did not forward President Obama's nominee to the Supreme Court, Merrick Garland, in the previous Congress, indicating the power of the Republican-controlled Senate at that time. The nomination of new Supreme Court associate justice Neil Gorsuch by President Trump was advanced in Congress by a simple majority. The Democratic Party's opposition to the nomination duly made the Republicans change the filibuster rule with regard to Supreme Court nominations.<sup>11</sup> Hence, in a party-line vote in the future, Republicans do not need Democrats to advance prospective nominations to the Court, which previously required a 60-vote threshold. This means that the minority party's leverage has changed in the Senate, and the situation also serves to illustrate the small majority of Republicans in Congress (52 senators). However, the trend over nominations started during Obama's presidency when the then Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid used the so-called "nuclear option" to change the rule on executive nominations.<sup>12</sup> Now the Supreme Court has nine justices once again, and the balance is tilted towards the conservatives. This is highly relevant when Court decisions often concern societally pertinent matters such as campaign funding or same-sex marriage, and when decisions are made with a 5-4 margin.<sup>13</sup>

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11 See e.g. *The New York Times*, April 6, 2017. How Senators Voted On the Gorsuch Filibuster and the Nuclear Option. [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/04/06/us/politics/gorsuch-supreme-court-vote.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/04/06/us/politics/gorsuch-supreme-court-vote.html?_r=0), accessed 30 August.

12 Heitshusen, Valeria. 2013. *Majority Cloture for Nominations: Implications and the "Nuclear" Proceedings*. CRS Report for Congress December 6, 2013. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43331.pdf>, accessed 30 August.

13 See e.g. Kuhn, David Paul. 2012. The Incredible Polarization and Politicization of the Supreme Court. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/06/the-incredible-polarization-and-politicization-of-the-supreme-court/259155/>, accessed 30 August.

In one of his tweets, President Trump mentioned eliminating filibuster altogether, but it did not receive the support of the GOP senators.<sup>14</sup> For legislative actions and nominations, the president needs Congress, but President Trump can advance his agenda to a certain extent by relying on executive actions without Congress. Executive orders have traditionally been used by presidents to advance their agenda. In addition to Trump's announcement of US withdrawal from the Paris climate accord, the president has also issued executive orders to rescind some of the regulations made by the previous government on the climate change agenda.<sup>15</sup> Executive orders do not have the status of law per se (even when they do have "a force of law"); hence, they are reversible, and future presidents can overrule their predecessors' orders.<sup>16</sup>

Presidents do not always achieve their intended aims by relying on executive orders, however. A case in point concerning their implications and restrictions on use concerns the closing of the prison facility at Guantanamo Bay. Although President Obama issued an executive order to close the base, Congress refused and did not allow detainees to be transferred to the US.<sup>17</sup> It is also not possible to change existing legislation by relying on executive orders.

If an executive order requires funding in order to have an impact, the president should most likely consult Congress, which has the power of the purse. Yet there are still quite a few actions that the president himself can take through executive orders. So far, for example, President Trump has issued an executive order to withdraw the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement. The issue has also been taken up in Congress, to which end Democratic Representative Rosa DeLauro submitted proposal H.R.596 "TPP withdrawal Act".<sup>18</sup>

In addition to issuing executive orders, the president can also pursue rules and regulations for establishing policy. In contrast to executive orders, the new government cannot overturn regulations that have entered into force just by issuing an order. The Congressional Review Act gives Congress the power to conduct oversight of agency rulemaking. The president could ask Congress to deregulate some of the rules set by

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14 Everett, Burgess, Kim Min Seung, Nelson Louis. 2017. GOP senators reject Trump's call to end filibuster. *Politico*, 05/02/17. <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/05/02/trump-tweet-government-shutdown-237870>, accessed 30 August.

15 For the details, see <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/04/promise-make-america-safe-again> and <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/28/president-trumps-energy-independence-policy>, accessed 30 August.

16 Chu, Vivian S. & Garvey, Todd. 2014. *Executive Orders: Issuance, Modification, and Revocation*. CRS Report for Congress. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS20846.pdf>, accessed 30 August.

17 See Bruck, Connie. 2016. Why Obama has failed to close Guantanamo. *The New Yorker*, August 1, 2016 issue. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/01/why-obama-has-failed-to-close-guantanamo>, accessed 30 August.

18 The Act would require the president to give written notice of the withdrawal of the US from the TPP agreement. See Congress.gov <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/596?r=3>, accessed 30 August.

the Obama administration, but this procedure is limited to only the most recent ones. When it comes to deregulation, the president is left with three options: he could seek judicial review, ask Congress to revoke some of the potential regulations, or use the regulatory process to influence existing regulations.<sup>19</sup> The Republican-controlled House of Representatives tried to pass the REINS Act during Obama's presidency, which would have required economically significant rules to be passed by both the House and the Senate before being signed by the President. This could become a new practice now that there is a Republican majority. The bill was passed by the House in spring 2017.<sup>20</sup>

One of President Trump's agenda matters has been actualized at least partly: namely his promise to cut regulations. One of the issued executive orders created a policy that for every new regulation, two existing ones should be terminated. The regulatory reform task force has been established to review the regulations in the agencies.<sup>21</sup>

While presidents clearly have a leading role in formulating US foreign policy, Congress also has a part to play. It is not very suited to managing daily crises, but it can make constructive contributions. That said, its role is often indirect rather than direct. For example, it plays a relevant part with regard to treaties when it provides its advice and consent, and in terms of funding, but also in certain actions related to defence and security cooperation, such as arms sales regulated by the Arms Export Control Act. However, this specifically concerns the ability to overrule a possible presidential veto on legislation aiming to prohibit or modify the sales.<sup>22</sup>

In the case of treaties (as distinct from executive agreements), the president needs to consult the Senate. One relevant recent example of the Senate playing a role was the NATO enlargement process concerning the membership of Montenegro in the organization. The issue was not unanimously approved in the Senate. Senator McCain, together with Democratic Senators Ben Cardin and Jeanne Shanneen, pushed forward a vote on the Senate floor on the membership of Montenegro on March 15. Senator Rand Paul, however, blocked the action by objecting to the unanimous consent agreement, prompting Senator McCain to state that Senator Paul was now "working for Vladimir

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19 Shapiro, Stuart. 2015. What new presidents can (and cannot) do about regulation. *The Hill*, 12/23/15. <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/presidential-campaign/264084-what-new-presidents-can-and-cannot-do-about>. Garvey, Todd. 2017. *A Brief Overview of Rulemaking and Judicial Review*. CRS Report for Congress, March 27, 2017. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41546.pdf>, accessed 30 August.

20 See e.g. Kolbert, Elizabeth. Suspending the rules: how Congress plans to undermine public safety. *The New Yorker*, January 9, 2017. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/suspending-the-rules-how-congress-plans-to-undermine-public-safety>, accessed 30 August.

21 Presidential Executive Order on Reducing Regulation and Controlling Regulatory Costs. The White House, January 30, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/30/presidential-executive-order-reducing-regulation-and-controlling->. Presidential Executive Order on Enforcing the Regulatory Reform Agenda. The White House, February 24, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/24/presidential-executive-order-enforcing-regulatory-reform-agenda>, accessed 30 August.

22 E.g. Grimmet, Richard F. 2010. *Arms Sales: Congressional Review Process*. CRS Report for Congress, January 8, 2010. <http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA512800>, accessed 30 August.

Putin” by objecting to Montenegro being a part of NATO.<sup>23</sup> The Senate subsequently approved the issue by a vote of 97 to 2. The two opposing members, Mike Lee and Rand Paul, were both Republican Party members.

With regard to the further role of Congress in formulating US foreign policy, different activities come to mind. These could entail promoting US interests through legislative efforts, funding for the State Department, or “person-to-person” diplomacy conducted by the Senators.<sup>24</sup> Sanctions are also relevant in this context. The question concerns the kind of role that the US Congress is willing to assume, or the issues or initiatives it decides to forward or object to. Joseph Nye, who has written extensively on American leadership, the 2016 election, and political fragmentation, has also discussed the role of Congress and domestic politics. Nye argues how Congress has, for example, enacted laws violating the “international legal principle of sovereign immunity”, which is a principle that protects American military and diplomatic personnel abroad, and foreign governments. In the past, for instance, the Senate has not been able to approve the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, even when the US has been counting on it to support the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea to counter “provocations” by China. For several years, the US Congress also discouraged the US from fulfilling a significant commitment to back the reallocation of the IMF’s voting quotas to China from Europe. Domestic opposition to putting a price on carbon emissions also makes it hard for the United States to take the lead in the battle against climate change.<sup>25</sup>

While the president can advance his agenda without Congress, he also needs to work with Congress to amend existing legislation or to enact new legislation, to implement a tax reform, and to authorize and appropriate. The committee hearings in Congress (whether on legislation, strategy, nominations or budget issues) are a significant setting for members of Congress to exert an influence on foreign policy issues, such as armed services or foreign relations.

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23 See Congressional Record, March 15 2017, S1830 (Accessed via Federal Digital System).

24 Bruder, Jason. 2016. How Congress can protect the U.S. from Russia. *Politico*, 10/26/16. <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2016/10/congresss-role-countering-russia-000225>, accessed 30 August.

25 See Nye, Joseph. 2017. Will the Liberal Order Survive? The History of an Idea. *Foreign Affairs*. January/February 2017 issue. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-12-12/will-liberal-order-survive>, accessed 30 August.

## ADVANCING THE AGENDA AND POLITICAL PROCEDURES

At present, bills would be easier to pass in the House because of the majority rule, but it could end up being more difficult to get them through in the Senate, where the Republican majority is narrower and not filibuster-proof (minimum of 60 senators).<sup>26</sup> As mentioned by Sarah Binder, there are several ways in which the minority party can have an influence in the Senate, not only by withdrawing their consent, thereby getting the Senate Majority Leader to invoke a cloture rule (requiring 60 votes to proceed), but also by setting the agenda and getting the majority party (Republicans) on the record with their votes (and therefore publicly announcing their position), possibly highlighting the different stands within the party. Senators can offer possibly unrelated amendments to the bills, giving Democrats an opportunity to create discord among the Republicans and between the Senators and the White House. While the Republicans can then blame the Democrats for blocking President Trump's agenda, it is the majorities that are more often held responsible for inaction than minorities are held accountable for blocking them.<sup>27</sup>

When President Obama took office in 2009, Congress was able to pass 11 legislative priorities in the first 100 days, but the Democrats also had a considerable 59-senator majority. Before handing over the presidency, Obama noted in an interview on the TV programme *60 Minutes* how he had a strong majority in both Houses of Congress in the first two years and that the administration was productive in comparison to any administration since the 1960s. He also mentioned that the US political system allows one to do a number of things. However, in order to maintain the governing majority, bipartisanship – some common ground – between the Democrats and Republicans is needed.<sup>28</sup> While President Obama signed legislation such as the Affordable Care Act on healthcare, it really gathered support only from the Democrats in Congress when the votes were counted.

During the divided government in the latter years of Obama's presidency, the Republicans adopted many tactics to obstruct Obama's agenda. Now that the same party holds the majority in Congress and the White House the situation is different. Whether any possible obstruction by the Democrats will matter more for the minority or the majority party in a negative sense remains to be seen. During President Obama's terms, obstruction of the political decision-making process and the ensuing gridlock was topical, but it was mainly between the parties. Now the focus is on intra-party tensions instead.

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26 The reconciliation process legislation requires only a simple majority but it is used only in consideration of a budget bill. See e.g. Carney, John. 2010. How Does Reconciliation Work In Congress? *Business Insider*, Jan. 17 2010. <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-does-reconciliation-work-in-congress-2010-1?r=US&IR=T&IR=T>, accessed 30 August.

27 Binder, Sarah. 2017. A Game Plan for Senate Democrats. *The New York Times*, The opinion pages, February 10, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/10/opinion/a-game-plan-for-senate-democrats.html>, accessed 30 August.

28 See Barack Obama: Eight Years in the White House. *60 Minutes CBS News*. Correspondent Steve Kroft, Jan. 15, 2017. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-barack-obama-eight-years-in-the-white-house/>, accessed 30 August.

While the Republicans controlling both Houses of Congress are keen to finally proceed with conservative legislative initiatives, struggles within the party seem to be inevitable. For example, in the early days of the government, the use of executive orders by President Trump has raised eyebrows within his own party as well.

The Federal Court decision overruling the first of President Trump's executive orders on immigrants coming from certain countries illustrates the limit of powers and the system of checks and balances. The members of Congress could also respond to President Trump's agenda with legislation. To this end, in response to Trump's action on immigration and refugees, a number of Democratic Senators introduced a bill in March 2017 "to nullify the effect of the recent Executive order regarding border security and immigration enforcement".<sup>29</sup> Whether the Republicans would act on this proposal by the Democrats when holding the majority in both the Senate and the House is another matter. President Trump issued a second, revised, ban in March. After a block by the circuit Court of Appeals, the administration has lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court over the travel ban case.<sup>30</sup> The Court allowed a part of the ban to go into effect. The Court will be considering the case later on.<sup>31</sup>

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29 See S.668 at Congress.gov <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/668/text>, accessed 30 August.

30 Fox News politics, June 12, 2017. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/06/12/9th-circuit-rules-against-trump-travel-ban.html>, accessed 30 August.

31 E.g. Vogue de, Ariane. Supreme Court allows part of travel ban to take effect. CNN, June 27, 2017. <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/26/politics/travel-ban-supreme-court/index.html>, accessed 30 August.

## “DIVIDING” ISSUES AMONG THE REPUBLICANS

There are certain policy issues that the Republicans have largely agreed on, such as energy and tax reform, but there are also some issues pending that give rise to different opinions between the White House and Congressional Republicans. One of President Trump’s campaign pledges has been to rebuild the military strength of the US.<sup>32</sup> Between 2010 and 2014, military spending decreased by 21% in real terms.<sup>33</sup> President Trump has duly proposed an increase to the defence budget for FY 2018.

The Senate passed by a vote of 89 to 8 The National Defence Authorization Act of 2018 that increases the military spending.<sup>34</sup> Republicans opposing the bill were senators Bob Corker, Mike Lee and Rand Paul.<sup>35</sup> The house has passed its measure earlier. With regard to the increase in defence spending, it should be noted that budget caps are still in place at the moment. President Obama signed “A Budget Control Act” in 2011 placing caps on federal spending until 2021, which also had an effect on military spending.<sup>36</sup> Lifting the congressionally issued spending caps was one of President Trump’s campaign pledges.

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32 See Donald Trump’s Contract with the American Voter. <https://assets.donaldjtrump.com/landings/contract/0-TRU-102316-Contractv02.pdf>, accessed 30 August.

33 See Perlo-Freeman, Sam, Fleurant, Aude, Wezeman, Pieter and Wezeman, Siemon. 2015. *Trends in world military expenditure*, 2015. SIPRI. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2016/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2015>, accessed 18 September.

34 Ks. esim. Lardner, Richard. 2017. Senate backs bill to pump 700 billion into military. *Chicago Tribune*, September 18, 2017. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-defense-policy-bill-20170918-story.html>, accessed 18 September. The funding is a two-step process as explained in the CRS report for Congress: “(1) enactment of an authorization measure that may create or continue an agency, program, or activity as well as authorize the subsequent enactment of appropriations; and (2) enactment of appropriations to provide funds for the authorized agency, program, or activity.” See Heniff, Bill Jr. 2012. *Overview of the Authorization–Appropriation process*. CRS Report for Congress November 26, 2012. <https://www.senate.gov/CRSpubs/d2b1dc6f-4ed2-46ae-83ae-1e13b3e24150.pdf>, accessed 18 September.

35 See the voting results here: [https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll\\_call\\_lists/roll\\_call\\_vote\\_cfm.cfm?congress=115&session=1&vote=00199#position](https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=115&session=1&vote=00199#position), accessed 18 September.

36 Since its adoption, the legislation has also been modified. For example, in 2015 Congress passed the “Bipartisan Budget Act” that raised the caps for FY 2016 and 2017 and allocated funding for overseas contingency operations. Harrison, Todd. 2016. What has the Budget Control Act of 2011 Meant for Defence? Center for Strategic & International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-has-budget-control-act-2011-meant-defense>, accessed 30 August.

The House has approved a Department of Defence Appropriation bill for FY 2018 to provide funding for national security.<sup>37</sup> The measure included funding for the border wall and increase in military spending. What will be finally enacted remains to be seen.

The president has also mentioned defunding the Department of State and agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or institutions such as the UN, which was also implied in his budget proposal (for the fiscal year 2018). The president's proposal reflects the priorities of the administration but it is for Congress to decide on the frame for funding in the end. The bipartisan continuing resolution passed by Congress in May securing funding until September 2017 did not include cuts to EPA funding, for example.<sup>38</sup> The measure granted funding for military spending and border security with some limitations on what the money could be used for.<sup>39</sup> It remains to be seen what the budget for FY 2018 will look like after congressional consideration. For example, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has been reported as calling Trump's FY 2018 budget proposal "A New Foundation for American Greatness" that it is only a "recommendation".<sup>40</sup>

In connection with the president's 2018 budget blueprint earlier, Republican Senator Marco Rubio, for one, has already mentioned that he does not support the defunding of the international affairs budget and diplomatic efforts headed by the State Department because they are "integral to our [US] national security". Representative Steve Stivers, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, whose aim is to sustain the House majority commented on this by saying, "A \$54 billion trade from domestic to defense spending – and I consider myself a defense hawk – I think that some of the

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37 See the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Press Release (July 27, 2017) "National Security Funding Bill Approved by the House." <https://appropriations.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=395040>. DeBonis, Mike. 2017. House passes bill to boost defence, fund border wall. *Washington Post*, Powerpost, July 27, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2017/07/27/house-passes-bill-to-boost-defense-fund-border-wall/?utm\\_term=.18588c6aa531](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2017/07/27/house-passes-bill-to-boost-defense-fund-border-wall/?utm_term=.18588c6aa531), accessed 30 August.

38 Myer, Robinson. 2017. What Does Trump's Budget Mean for the Environment? *The Atlantic*, May 24, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/05/trump-epa-budget-noaa-climate-change/527814/>, accessed 30 August.

39 See e.g. Golshan, Taran. 2017. Congress just reached a funding deal to keep the government open. *Vox*, May 1, 2017. <https://www.vox.com/2017/4/30/15496696/congress-funding-deal-government-open>, accessed 30 August.

40 For more on the comments by the GOP on the president's proposal, see "Bipartisan Pushback Greets Trump's Proposed Budget, Kate Davidson, Kristina Peterson and Natalie Andrews at Fox Business May 23, 2017. <http://www.foxbusiness.com/features/2017/05/23/bipartisan-pushback-greets-trumps-proposed-budget1.html>, accessed 30 August.

cuts are a little drastic in certain places”.<sup>41</sup> The division also becomes more evident among members representing those states where the cuts are having the deepest effect. After the release of President’s budget proposal, a group of 43 Senators (including six Republicans) criticised the budget cuts on the State Department and Foreign aid in contrast to boosting defence spending.<sup>42</sup>

In general, some of Trump’s agenda items require strong state funding that can cause problems among the conservatives. Congress is also facing the question of the debt ceiling in the fall. President Trump and Democrats have somewhat surprisingly found a common ground on some of the fiscal policy issues including “a short term plan” to secure government funding and raise the borrowing limit of the government.<sup>43</sup>

The ongoing Congress committee investigations concerning election hacking and Russian involvement during the presidential election campaign are another issue causing tension. The question of election hacking has largely been missing from President Trump’s policy agenda. Members of Congress have called for cooperation from the administration and its agencies over the issue. The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Charles Grassley, even threatened to block the nomination of Rod J. Rosenstein as Deputy Attorney General until such time as his committee received an FBI briefing on the issue.<sup>44</sup> Several congressional committees (Senate Intelligence and Judiciary, House Intelligence and Oversight) are conducting investigations into the alleged Russian interference in the US elections or Trump’s campaign connections with Russia.<sup>45</sup> Previously, Michael Flynn, the then National Security Advisor in the Trump administration, offered his resignation because of claims he had not been “truthful” about his connections to the

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41 Quoted in Breshan, John, Ferris, Sarah, Scholtes, Jennifer. 2017. Republicans pan Trump budget. *Politico*, 03/16/2017. <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/03/trump-budget-republicans-capitol-hill-236146>, accessed 30 August. Rubio’s comments on President’s Budget Blueprint, Mar 16, 2017. <http://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=AF526B5B-E994-4013-87DB-112B798CEED1>, accessed 30 August.

42 Tritten, Travis J. 2017. 43 senators rally against Trump’s foreign aid cuts. *Washington Examiner*, April 27, 2017. <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/43-senators-rally-against-trumps-foreign-aid-cuts/article/2621494>, accessed 30 August.

43 DeBonis, Mike, Snell, Kelsey, Rucker, Philip & Viebeck, Elise. 2017. Trump sides with Democrats on Fiscal issues, throwing Republican plans into chaos. *The Washington Post*, PowerPost, September 7, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/house-prepares-for-harvey-relief-vote/2017/09/06/62919058-92fc-11e7-89fa-bb822a46da5b\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.7c13ba46d16e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/house-prepares-for-harvey-relief-vote/2017/09/06/62919058-92fc-11e7-89fa-bb822a46da5b_story.html?utm_term=.7c13ba46d16e), accessed 18 September.

44 Demirjian, Karoun and O’Keefe, Ed. 2017. Members of Congress demand cooperation from administration on Trump–Russia probe. *The Washington Post*, PowerPost, March 15, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/is-there-an-investigation-graham-demands-answers-from-fbi-on-russia/2017/03/15/9d98c330-097a-11e7-93dc-00f9bdd74ed1\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.d943af46e06e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/is-there-an-investigation-graham-demands-answers-from-fbi-on-russia/2017/03/15/9d98c330-097a-11e7-93dc-00f9bdd74ed1_story.html?utm_term=.d943af46e06e), accessed 30 August.

45 For more about the details, see e.g. Uhrmacher, Kevin and Soffen, Kim. 2017. A guide to five major investigations of the Trump campaign’s possible ties to Russia. *The Washington Post*, May 30, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/trump-russia-investigations/?utm\\_term=.a23b1d00b19f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/trump-russia-investigations/?utm_term=.a23b1d00b19f), accessed 30 August.

Russian embassy.<sup>46</sup> A special prosecutor has also been appointed to investigate. Robert Mueller, former head of the FBI, was appointed “to serve as Special Counsel to oversee the previously-confirmed FBI investigation of Russian government efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election and related matters”.<sup>47</sup> The ongoing investigation has not been without its own dramatic twists and turns as both Attorney General Jeff Sessions and chairman of the House Intelligence Committee Denis Nunes have withdrawn from the investigations.

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46 See e.g. Collinson, Stephen. 2017. Flynn’s resignation doesn’t end controversy surrounding White House. CNN, February 14, 2017. <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/14/politics/michael-flynn-russia-resignation-politics/index.html>, accessed 30 August.

47 See Department of Justice. Appointment of a Special Counsel. May 17, 2017. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/appointment-special-counsel>, accessed 30 August.

## THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT

Thus far, the foreign policy decisions or lines taken by the Trump administration have caused some disarray. For example, the proposed budget cuts in relevant departments, and the emphasis on hard rather than soft power in light of the increase in military spending while cutting the State Department budget have raised discussion. The same goes for the dwindling US commitment to multilateral organizations and treaties, although in this respect the issue of US commitment to NATO is nothing new. It was actually inscribed in a resolution during the NATO summit in Wales 2014 that member countries should fulfill the two per cent requirement for defence spending.<sup>48</sup> A visit by President Trump to Brussels did not entirely dispel doubts about the US commitment, however. In his remarks, Trump again highlighted the two per cent minimum spending, but did not mention the collective defence article in particular.<sup>49</sup> In a joint press conference held in Washington on June 9, 2017 together with the President of Romania, President Trump seemed to confirm his administration's commitment when answering a question about collective defence and whether the United States should act in regard to Article 5.<sup>50</sup>

There have been some indications that the US would seek to diminish its contributions to or withdraw from multilateral organizations and certain international treaties, such as the Paris climate accord. The funding for and US commitment to the United Nations has also been under consideration. This was also implied in the president's FY 2018 budget, formulated as "The Budget also renews attention on the appropriate U.S. share of international spending at the United Nations, at the World Bank, and for many other global issues where the United States currently pays more than its fair share".<sup>51</sup> The US commitment to the UN has also been taken up by members of Congress. Republican Party Representative Mike Rogers introduced a bill entitled "American Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2017" in January 2017 aiming "to end the membership of the United States in the United Nations".<sup>52</sup> Congress has previously attached some reform initiatives or conditions to the UN funding, and this option seems to be on the table once again.<sup>53</sup>

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48 See the Wales Summit Declaration at [http://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm), accessed 30 August.

49 See Remarks by President Trump at NATO unveiling of the Article 5 and Berlin Wall memorials, May 25, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/25/remarks-president-trump-nato-unveiling-article-5-and-berlin-wall>, accessed 30 August.

50 See Remarks by President Trump and President Iohannis of Romania in a Joint Press Conference. June 9, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/09/remarks-president-trump-and-president-iohannis-romania-joint-press>, accessed 30 August.

51 See Budget of the U.S. Government. A New Foundation for American Greatness. Fiscal Year 2018. Office of Management and Budget, p. 13.

52 See H.R.193 <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr193/text>, accessed 30 August.

53 See the summary of State and Foreign Operations Bill for FY 2018 as Reported by the House Appropriations Committee. <https://appropriations.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=394988>, accessed 30 August.

Decreasing UN funding has also cropped up on the Republican agenda before and would now be more likely to move forward because of the Republican majority. However, recently the Republican controlled Senate Appropriations committee voted to fund U.N. Climate agency.<sup>54</sup> The UN funding is based on membership of and voluntary allocations for the UN organizations. The State and Foreign operations bill for FY 2018, reported by the House Appropriations Committee in July, 2017, suggested decreased funding for “assessed payments to the United Nations and international organizations” compared to the 2017 level. Funding for international security assistance and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) would be similarly decreased compared to the FY 2017 according to the appropriation bill as reported.<sup>55</sup>

During his speech<sup>56</sup> at the Department of State, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson clarified the “America first” thinking in US foreign policy. According to Tillerson, it means securing the nation and protecting the people. It combines the maintenance of values and economic prosperity: “So it’s foreign policy projected with a strong ability to enforce the protection of our freedoms with a strong military”. Tillerson gives the impression that alliances matter to the United States, but that the imbalance should be redressed. The interesting departure from Obama’s foreign policy seems to concern the status of values. Whereas President Obama’s emphasis was on promoting values through international institutions and agreements and in bilateral relations, this seems to be called into question now. Tillerson formulated matters as follows: “But I think it is – I think it’s really important that all of us understand the difference between policy and values, and in some circumstances, we should and do condition our policy engagements on people adopting certain actions as to how they treat people. They should. We should demand that. But that doesn’t mean that’s the case in every situation”. It remains to be seen in which contexts this will indeed be the case.

The control of government by the same party may be beneficial in terms of executive nominations having foreign policy implications or toning down the differences in policy-making, and advancing the shared “party” priorities in all relevant policy areas. The budget is also highly relevant in this respect. Problems in conducting foreign policy could stem from staff shortages, particularly in the State Department. There are many open positions with no nominees announced, including the position of US Ambassador to Finland.<sup>57</sup> There has been also many changes in positions of the president’s cabinet and personnel.

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54 Cama, Timothy. 2017. Senate panel votes to fund UN climate agency. *The Hill*, 09/07/17. <http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/349693-senate-panel-votes-to-fund-un-climate-agency>, accessed 18 September.

55 See press release (July 19, 2017) Appropriations Committee Releases Fiscal Year 2018 State and Foreign Operations Bill. <https://appropriations.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=395027>, accessed 30 August.

56 See his remarks at <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/05/270620.htm>, accessed 30 August.

57 *The Washington Post* keeps a record of the nominees; see <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-administration-appointee-tracker/database/>, accessed 30 August.

Public opinion counts in the United States in both domestic and foreign policy, not only in terms of policy options but also in the power relations between Congress and the president. Both should communicate with the public and try to exert an influence in that way. However, this could also be a restricting factor. After George W. Bush's presidency, there was scope for Barack Obama to campaign with a pledge to withdraw from Iraq. In this regard, the pendulum has swung back and forth between more interventionist and more isolationist policies. In recent years, popular opinion in the US has been characterized by "war weariness" and limited participation in world affairs. According to a Pew Research Center poll conducted in May 2016, public opinion was divided over what America's place in the world should be. More than half of Americans were of the opinion that it would be better for the US to just take care of its own problems and to let other countries take care of theirs. At the same time, however, public support for defence spending has increased.<sup>58</sup> The US missile strikes in response to the reports of use of chemical weapons in Syria were also supported by a clear majority of Americans (58% to 36%) according to another Pew Research Center poll.<sup>59</sup> At the time of Obama presidency, possible military action against Syria was unpopular among members of both parties, as well as the public, and despite some proposals<sup>60</sup>, Congress did not proceed with the issue. The development of public opinion about Trump's presidency will be interesting to follow from the perspective of balancing between the "America first" attitude and the US role in the international dilemma. In addition to the military action in Syria, the Trump administration imposed new sanctions on Syrian government workers after the chemical attacks.<sup>61</sup>

A discussion has already centred on whether the Trump administration's foreign policy is becoming more mainstream in its policy issues. One issue concerns his cabinet members. It has been reported that prior to the recent US military attack in Syria, Trump relied on intelligence from the conventional quarter including his Secretaries of State and Defence, National Security Adviser and Joint Chiefs of Staff. Steve Bannon, Trump's senior adviser, was also removed from the National Security Council previously before leaving the government altogether.<sup>62</sup> This was not necessarily because of the party or domestic influence, but rather because the pending circumstances called for compromise.

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58 See the poll at <http://www.people-press.org/2016/05/05/public-uncertain-divided-over-americas-place-in-the-world/>, accessed 30 August.

59 Pew Research Center. Public Supports Syria Missile Strikes, but Few See a 'Clear Plan' for Addressing Situation. April 12, 2017. <http://www.people-press.org/2017/04/12/public-supports-syria-missile-strikes-but-few-see-a-clear-plan-for-addressing-situation/>, accessed 30 August.

60 S.J. Res. 21 "Authorization for the Use of Military Force Against the Government of Syria to Respond to Use of Chemical Weapons. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/21>, accessed 30 August.

61 Davis Hirschfeld, Julia. 2017. U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Syrian Government Workers After Sarin Attack. *The New York Times*, April 24, 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/24/world/middleeast/trump-syria-chemical-weapons-missiles-sanctions.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/24/world/middleeast/trump-syria-chemical-weapons-missiles-sanctions.html?_r=0), accessed 30 August.

62 See the discussion in Karni, Annie. 2017. Trump's foreign policy goes mainstream. *Politico*, 10/4/17. <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/04/donald-trump-foreign-policy-mainstream-staffers-237046>, accessed 30 August.

In his actions against terrorism, President Trump could arguably rely on the authorization for the use of military force issued by Congress in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks with no clear termination of the resolution in sight, not to mention his constitutional powers as the Commander-in-Chief. The president issued a memorandum “to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” on January 28, 2017. It may happen that the 115th Congress will proceed to enact a new authorization against ISIS, as pointed out by professor of US politics Andrew Rudalevige.<sup>63</sup> Secretary of Defence James Mattis mentioned while testifying in Congress in the Senate Defence Appropriations subcommittee that Congress could have a debate and vote on the issue. Recently, Republican Congress members have introduced H.J.Res. 89 “To authorize the use of United States Armed Forces against al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, successor organizations, and associated forces”.<sup>64</sup> The reason why Congress could act now is that the Court has not tackled the issue of the War Powers Resolution to date. But it could do so in the future when the use of armed force possibly becomes more expansive.<sup>65</sup>

To date, Congress has taken certain actions to curb the powers of the president. The sanctions bill curbing the president’s power to lift sanctions on Russia was already mentioned. In addition, the Republican majority House and its Committee on appropriation approved an amendment that would repeal the 2001 authorization for use of military force for the first time. The final version of the bill (H.R. 3219), however, watered down the proposal made by Representative Barbara Lee during the committee consideration.<sup>66</sup>

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63 See more about the discussion why Congress could act now in Andrew Rudalevige. 2017. Congress may give Trump legal authority to fight the Islamic State. *The Washington Post*, Monkey Cage analysis, March 27, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/03/27/congress-may-give-trump-the-authority-to-fight-the-islamic-state-which-it-says-he-already-has/?utm\\_term=.4de33466908d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/03/27/congress-may-give-trump-the-authority-to-fight-the-islamic-state-which-it-says-he-already-has/?utm_term=.4de33466908d), accessed 30 August.

64 See the text of the resolution at: [https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-joint-resolution/89/text?q={%22search%22%3A\[%22authorization+use+military+force%22\]}&r=2](https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-joint-resolution/89/text?q={%22search%22%3A[%22authorization+use+military+force%22]}&r=2), accessed 30 August.

65 See fn. 63.

66 Wire, Sarah D. Rep. Barbara Lee won’t get her vote after all. *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/politics/essential/la-pol-ca-essential-politics-updates-rep-barbara-lee-s-war-authorization-1500478826-htmlstory.html>, accessed 19 September.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order for the Republicans to advance their agenda, they need to be on the same page. In this sense, communication between the White House and the Capitol is key. Republican members of Congress have complained that they were not consulted on some of the early executive orders. In effect, within his first 100 days, Trump issued more executive orders than any president since Harry S. Truman, and signed more bills into law than the previous five presidents.<sup>67</sup> Despite the numbers, substantive legislative victories are still pending at the time of writing. The first attempts to pass the healthcare repeal and replacement failed, indicating that not enough pre-work had been done to ensure that sufficient votes existed. The House managed to vote on the issue by 217 to 213 on May 4, 2017.<sup>68</sup> All of the Democrats and 20 Republicans voted against. Further attempts to pass proposals on healthcare failed in the Senate because Republicans did not managed to gather 51 votes despite their majority.<sup>69</sup>

Domestic politics can also have foreign policy implications and throw a strategy off course. Moreover, the effects are not necessarily always direct, as in 2013 when President Obama had to cancel his trip to Asia because of the budget battles with congressional Republicans that threatened to shut down the government.<sup>70</sup>

President Trump has no previous political experience in Congress. It will be interesting to see whether Vice President Mike Pence with his long track record will take more active lead in building up relations in the same way that Vice President Joe Biden did during the Obama presidency. The delegation of power could turn out to be a strengthening factor or a negative one. In a situation in which the president is “weak”, the powers of Congress could be reinforced in both domestic and foreign policy. The power to set the agenda(s) could be transferred to the Republicans in Congress. However, in general, Congress enjoys relatively low confidence among the American public. According to the average figures published online in a Real Clear Politics poll accessed on August 9, 2017, Congressional Job approval ratings indicated 15% approval, and 73,3% disapproval.<sup>71</sup> The president also has relatively low popularity ratings among the general public, and it

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67 Cohen, Marshall and Payson-Denney, Wade. 2017. By the numbers: How Trump stacks up after 100 days. CNN, May 1, 2017. <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/29/politics/donald-trump-100-days-data/>, accessed 30 August.

68 See more at <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/05/04/obamacare-replacement-bill-approved-in-house.html>, accessed 30 August.

69 Klein, Ezra. 2017. The GOP's massive health care failures, explained. Vox, July 28, 2017. <https://www.vox.com/health-care/2017/7/28/16055284/gop-massive-health-care-failures-explained>, accessed 30 August.

70 Chollet, Derek. 2016. *The Long Game. How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World*. New York: Public Affairs.

71 See, [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/congressional\\_job\\_approval-903.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/congressional_job_approval-903.html), accessed 30 August.

has recently been claimed that his “base seems to be eroding”.<sup>72</sup> Public support is often considered to constitute “leverage” for the president in regard to Congress.<sup>73</sup> It seems that the lack of leadership has complicated fulfilling the agenda and how issues proceed. The public opinion matters also in the relationship between the president and his own party. In a situation where the president’s “standing in the public sphere” is not that high, they often face problems of cooperating with their own party members as well.<sup>74</sup> The healthcare legislation – its repeal and replacement – is one example, in which the party couldn’t find a common ground. There has been also some signs of bipartisanship other than related to the fiscal policy issue as mentioned earlier. Reportedly, President Trump has turned to Democrats for a discussion on DACA, a programme of youth undocumented immigrants and border security.<sup>75</sup>

Support aside, attention should also be paid to the opposition. While the US political system does not recognize the opposition in the same way as in the parliamentary system, for example, this does not mean that it does not exist. Political writer Perry Bacon has identified six different groups that have expressed opposing views to President Trump so far in different policy issues. According to Bacon, the most significant groups are: “the bureaucracy”; “the Courts”; “the Democrats in Congress”; “the Republicans in Congress”; “the Media” and “the Public”. Bacon also gives examples of different issues and the blocks activated by them. According to his review, the travel ban issue activated opposition from all of the groups mentioned above and forced President Trump to revise the executive order. This naturally begs the question of how effective the opposing voices are in the first place, and what kind of tools the president has at his disposal to pursue his agenda and overcome the opposition.<sup>76</sup> A recent action brought against Trump entails a federal lawsuit filed by almost 200 congressional Democrats, who have reportedly sued the president on the basis of overlooking a constitutional clause forbidding government officials from accepting “emoluments” or “gifts” from foreign powers without the approval of Congress.<sup>77</sup>

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72 Silver, Nate. 2017. Donald Trump’s Base is Shrinking. *FiveThirtyEight*, May 24, 2017. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/donald-trumps-base-is-shrinking/>, accessed 30 August.

73 E.g. Cassino, Dan. 2017. Trump’s Low Approval Numbers Matter – Here’s Why. *Harvard Business Review*, Feb. 3, 2017. <https://hbr.org/2017/02/trumps-low-approval-numbers-matter-heres-why>, accessed 30 August.

74 Chafetz, Josh. The Real ‘Resistance’ to Trump. The GOP Congress. *Politico*, June 6, 2017. <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/06/the-real-resistance-to-trump-the-gop-congress-215230>, accessed 18 September.

75 Siegel, Benjamin. Democrats claim deal reached over DACA, Trump disagrees on twitter. ABC News, Sept. 14, 2017. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/democrats-claim-deal-trump-young-undocumented-immigrants/story?id=49837488>, accessed 18 September.

76 Bacon, Perry Jr. 2017. Six Degrees of Trump opposition. *FiveThirtyEight*, Apr. 3, 2017. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-trump-opposition-meter/>, accessed 30 August.

77 See Lafraniere, Sharon. 2017. Democrats in Congress to Sue Trump over Foreign Business Dealings. *The New York Times*, June 14, 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/14/us/politics/democrats-in-congress-to-sue-trump-over-foreign-business-dealings.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/14/us/politics/democrats-in-congress-to-sue-trump-over-foreign-business-dealings.html?_r=0), accessed 30 August.

Forthcoming scenarios vis-à-vis Trump's leadership in the White House could be characterized by the following tendencies: 1) balancing – the administration will find a way to advance its agenda within the limits of separation of powers and checks and balances, 2) strengthening – the administration will benefit from the Republican majority government and popular support despite the potential erosion of the political order, 3) distinguishing – the president's agenda and the Republicans' agenda will be separated, and 4) weakening – the presidency will become a burden for the party. What could happen is that in a situation where there are no big victories in domestic politics, the political capital could be increasingly shifted towards foreign policy initiatives. One factor regarding the Trump presidency that engenders interest concerns the rallies for his own supporters that the president has continued to organize in contrast to previous practice. For example, on April 29 2017, marking the first 100 days of his presidency, Trump held one such rally for his supporters in Pennsylvania. In this way, the president can connect and communicate directly with his support base and emphasize those issues that he considers to be of paramount importance.

To sum up, the power of Congress is more influential in domestic politics, where the president plays a more limited role with regard to proposing the agenda and vetoing enacted legislation. From the perspective of getting legislative measures passed, the government commonly benefits from the majority party status in both the Congress and the White House. In foreign policy, the effect is seldom that visible because the president already has more leeway. The period during which the government is under one-party control can have an effect on the oversight role of Congress. This does not rule out differences of opinion among Republicans, however. So far, one of the dividing issues has been the US relationship with Russia, an area that could provide some common ground for bipartisanship. A further issue that could be mentioned is whether circumstances and pressure from within the party will continue to shape Trump's foreign policy in the direction of more "mainstream" Republicanism. Or whether the agendas of Republicans and president Trump will be further separated? The Obama presidency was characterized by gridlock and a dysfunctional government. It remains to be seen whether the tension between the parties will be replaced by intra-party tensions in the current presidency.