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THESIS REVIEW

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The analysis of worldview concepts within the foreign and security political discourses of American republican presidents at the turn of the 3rd millennium.

Ph.D. Dissertation

Author's Summary

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1. Formulating the scientific problem

The topic of the thesis may be considered as a constantly recurring and essential one from many respects, both for researchers, policy analysts, decision-makers as well as for external observers, common lay people, too. Namely, the core question revolves around that what sorts of beliefs, set of ideas or conceptual paradigms influenced, affected the mindset, intellectual framework of top decision-makers in the United States? More precisely, the thesis focuses on the examination of four Republican American presidents at the turn of the 20th century beginning of the 21st century from President Reagan to Donald Trump.

It is a commonly shared recognition that Hungary is linked with a plethora of interwoven bonds, personal, cultural, economic and military connections to the core-country of the Western civilization, namely to the United States. Moreover, there is also a Hungarian diaspora of almost 1.5 million American citizens, not to mention the significant importance of American Hungarian scientists, military leaders and film producers over the centuries. Thus, whatever emerges and takes place in the United States evidently has its implications, impacts on Hungary, too. For this reason, mapping and analyzing the socio-cultural, political trends and events overseas tend to be a core Hungarian foreign political and economic interest, without any doubt. Understanding the intellectual heritage and set of ideas in their context is of utmost importance for Hungary taken the current (2023-24) ‘controversial’ diplomatic relations between the two states.

Furthermore, from historic hindsight and perspective it is also essential to get a clear picture and comprehension of the Cold War era events and intellectual history of the United States in that period of modern history. All the complex trends and political phenomena cannot be properly grasped in this matter without the proper revelation of the correlations between history of ideas, intellectual history and foreign and security policies of the era towards the end of the 20th century.

As an epilogue to the doctoral thesis it can be stated that without the crucial contribution of President Reagan’s and his firm anti-communist and anti-Soviet stance, as well as President Bush’s special conservative personality and realistic foreign policies, the fate of the whole

Central-East European region, including Hungary, would have turned into a totally different, and presumably more negative direction.¹

From this respect, it may be important to note that there has not been elaborated any scholarly paper or comparative, comprehensive in-depth analysis of this kind about the four distinguished American Republican presidents within the Hungarian academic world.

2.Hypotheses and research objectives

The theoretical fundament and vintage point of the thesis evolves around the primary presumption that all the crucially important foreign and security political decisions, such as the renowned ‘Star Wars project’, the ‘struggle against the evil empire’ or the ‘new world order’ concept could not have been elaborated and shaped without the conservative set of ideas, religious spirituality, moral fundaments as well as the pragmatic realist attitude of the Republican American presidents involved in the examination. With the neo-Protestant awakening movement of Billy Graham, the ‘born again Christianity’ of President George W. Bush and his cabinet members’ neoconservative foreign political aspirations altogether defined and shaped the evolution of the international order and set of ideas on global context in the first decade of the 21st century.

Furthermore, I shall analyze and indulge into the examination of the foreign and security policies of President Trump, the ‘scandalous’ political newcomer in Washington, also investigating the intellectual background of his ideas within the socio-psychologic dimension of his intellectual frameworks and habits of his mind.

The main analytic research focus of the thesis evolves around identifying and examining all those factors and elements, which belong to the realm of vague ideas, spirituality, political philosophy that prove to affect directly or indirectly the decisions and acts of top executives, presidents within the dimension of American foreign and security policies. The analysis will rely mostly on the content analysis of topic relevant primary resources, state documents, cabinet meeting minutes and presidents’ own memoires that are publicly available in the matter.

¹ See SCHMIDT, Mária (ed.) : *Egy vidéki srác a gonosz birodalma ellen. Ronald Reagan 1911-2001.*[*A lad from the countryside against the evil empire. Ronald Reagan*] Budapest: XX. Század Intézet, 2011., ill. SCHMIDT Mária (ed.) : *Európa szerencséje. George H.W.Bush az USA 41. elnöke.*[*The luck of Europe. George H.W.Bush, the 41st President of the US*] Budapest: XX. Század Intézet, 2012.

As it will reveal along the thesis, this task proves to be much more complex and divergent in nature and in terms of academic discipline than the hypotheses below would suggest.

H1 In order to gather evidences and prove the assumption of my primary hypothesis claiming that some American ideas of puritan religious heritage e.g. ‘the new Sion’ or ‘the shining City upon a Hill’ shared important influence on the worldview, mindset, morality and decisions of the chosen American presidents, I am going to analyze the most important presidential declarations, speeches, cabinet documents available in the matter within the paradigm of US foreign and security policies.

Along my hypothesis I shall seek appropriate answers to the following core questions:

1. can there be traced the presence of any idea, either secular or religious by nature, in the life or principles of life of the key decision-makers or behind their foreign and security policies analyzed in the thesis?
2. provided there can be such ideas or concepts identified, which are those and where they originate from?

By the end of the thesis I shall provide positive reinforcing answers and evidences to the queries stated above.

H2 According to the assumption of my **second hypothesis** the special American civilizational idea of mission and exceptionalism tend to prevail particularly among the American Republican presidents involved in the thesis analysis. These principles reveal from the action plans, political objectives, rhetoric schemes and core value fundamentals of the presidential administrations in the matter. This assumption and phenomena could as well be spotted and identified in the case of some outstanding American presidents from the Democratic Party, as well (such as Wilson, F.D. Roosevelt, or J.F. Kennedy) although I shall focus primarily and exclusively on the analysis of the four Republican Party American presidents due to the content and paper-length restrictions of the thesis. In my study I shall present and provide an insightful analysis into the realm of political philosophical ideas, intellectual history of the chosen American presidents, and also I tend to provide legitimate and justified evidences to my presumptions in this context.

Along the H2 of my thesis I tend to find proper answers and evidences to the following queries within the focus point of my analytic examination:

1. What effect do the American civil religion and pseudo-religious set of ideas of mission tend to represent and manifest behind the policy decisions of the chosen American presidents?
2. In what way and manner can some distinguished secular and religious ideas be implemented and turned into political actions and practice in Washington through the personality and office of the American presidents?

3. Research methods

Taken the specific theoretical nature of the paper, in my thesis I shall primarily deal with comparative analytic content analysis of various documents from American intellectual history, political philosophy and foreign and security political resources which tend to belong to the academic dimension of international relations, security studies and military sciences. Altogether these features and factors aggregate and make into an interdisciplinary-type of examination which prevails within the dimension of social sciences.

By the end of the paper I shall reveal revelatory evidences and correlations among others on the recurring question regarding the reasons behind the outstanding performance and national accomplishment of the United States in the 'long 20th century,' when it basically managed to become a superpower and turn that era into an 'American century'² despite its own trends towards isolationism and several retrograde factors.

Through inductive resource analysis and analytic examination, I shall penetrate and look into the special phenomenon of American civil religion³ and the theological aspects of prevailing religious affiliations in the United States, also present in the lives and political activities of the chosen presidents. Altogether these religious and secular religious clusters of ideas and values cannot and should not be neglected in any thorough examination related to the disciplines of intellectual history, security studies or international relations.

² As it was proclaimed by media mogul Henry Luce in *Life* magazine in 1941 „The American century” see. JESSUP, John K, (ed.): *The Ideas of Henry Luce*. New York: Athenaeum, 1969, pp. 105 – 120.

³ See Robert N. BELLAH: 'Civil religion in America' In *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 191

In the first part of the doctoral thesis I consider it essential to provide a thorough introduction into the complex world of political secular and religious ideas, principles with their interwoven clusters of special features, which can as well be identified in policy making and in our everyday lives. I shall perform this theoretical summary along with the presentation of the relevant disciplinary features of various theories of international relations, security studies and history of ideas providing an interdisciplinary approach that proves to be prevailing nowadays in social sciences.

In the second, bigger part of the thesis I shall investigate the foreign and security policies-related spirituality, set of political and other (semi-religious or religious) ideas of the four distinguished American presidents at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century according to the presumptions and criteria set in my hypotheses. The expected remedies and positive findings of the complex and thorough research in the matter may be guaranteed by the vast amount of presidential archive materials or *corpus* made publicly available recently in the United States. I had the unique opportunity to indulge into the primary resources of several presidential libraries on the spot during my lengthy stay in the United States, thanks to my Fulbright scholarship in the fall of 2019. Altogether I spent several weeks in the following American libraries and archives:

United States National Archives; Library of Congress, Washington D.C., William McKinley Presidential Library, Canton, Ohio; Benjamin Franklin Library, Philadelphia; John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Quincy-Boston; George Bush Presidential Library, College Station, Texas; Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California.

Typical of the scholarly approaches within the realm of humanities and social sciences, history and policy-making mechanisms may as well be considered to belong rather to art than to positivistic science, as the renowned American Hungarian conservative scholar John Lukacs would also assert it.⁴ Therefore, based on the rather theoretical nature and feature of the thesis focus, it cannot be expected to have exact objective conclusions and clear-cut evidences revealed in the dimension of ideas and principles prevailing in international relations and security studies, too, as it would be the case of studies on natural sciences⁵. Evidently, I shall respect and partly implement the methodological frameworks applied in the intellectual field of

⁴ LUKACS, John: *Historical Consciousness. The remembered Past*. London: Transactions Publ., 1985, pp. 23 – 36.

⁵ See EGEDY Gergely: *Bevezetés a nemzetközi kapcsolatok elméletébe. [Introduction to the theory of international relations]*. HVG-ORAC Lap- és Könyvkiadó Kft., Budapest, 2011, pp.56–57.

the theories of international relations and security studies, about which we can read a thorough compilation by Péter Marton, expert of international relations theory and foreign policy analysis in Hungary⁶.

In high politics and particularly in the United States with the prevailing hero-cult and great leader-centric political structures, the role and personality of the president is extremely significant (see the classic term of Hamilton that ‘the American president is an elected monarch’) that can affect and determine the political power structures, strategy-making and objective-setting mechanisms in Washington D.C., seemingly counterbalancing the power position, system-resistance of state bureaucracy.

Along this revelation, I tend to apply the ‘classic leadership personality theory’ of George Kelly from the methodological approaches used in international relations theory analyses⁷. Similarly the leadership trait analysis or LTA elaborated by Margaret Hermann⁸ tend to be beneficial and applicable in the context of the thesis, on the cognitive and psychological complexities and impacts of top executives, political leaders, such as presidents. Stephen Dyson used to implement these methods in a similar manner in his foreign political personality analyses on British prime minister Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair⁹.

Within the theoretical methodological approaches, the so-called ‘organizational process paradigm’ or OPP tends to be another useful analytic method in foreign and security policy discourse analyses. This method focuses on analyzing the complex correlations between the ideas, preconceptions of the leaders *versus* the dissenting state administration or the powerful resistance of cabinet bureaucracy as revealed by Morton Halperin, Priscilla Capp¹⁰ or Iver Neumann¹¹. It might as well be revelatory to apply in the case of Donald Trump’s controversial rather hostile nexus with the so-called ‘deep state’ bureaucracy of Washington D.C.

⁶ MARTON Péter: *A külpolitika elemzése [The analysis of foreign policy.]* Budapest: AJTK, 2013, pp. 42 – 57.

⁷ KELLY, George: *The psychology of personal construct*. New York: Norton, 1st ed. 1955.

⁸ See HERMANN, Margaret et alia: „Who Leads Matters” In *International Studies Review*. 3:2, pp. 83 – 131. and PERVIN, Lawrence A.: *Personality: Theory and Parctice*. New York, Brisbane: Wiley & Sons, 5th edition, 1989.

⁹ DYSON, Stephen: „Cognitive style and Foreign Policy: Margarate Thatcher’s black-and-white thinking”. *International Political Science Review*.30, 2009, pp. 33 – 48.

¹⁰ HALPERIN, Morton H., CLAPP, Priscilla: *Bureaucratic politics and Foreign Policy*. Washington: Brookings Institute Press, 2006, 25.

¹¹ NEUMANN, Iver: „Why diplomats never produce anything New”. In *New International Political Sociology*. 1, pp. 183 – 200.

During the elaboration of the thesis paper I tended to rely predominantly on primary resources, written documents related to the speeches, memoirs and minutes of the presidents and their direct aides. Altogether it is supposed to be an essential scholarly attitude and aspect in order to get a clear and direct insight into the genuine thoughts, values and assumptions of the top executives within the context of the hypotheses of the paper.

4. Brief thesis summary

In the four major thematic parts of the thesis paper I examined the intellectual background, worldview and spirituality of the four Republican American presidents along the contexts and analytic focus points of the hypotheses. I also considered important to address the significant topic of religiosity and issues of Christian faith as well as the complexity of denominations within the fabric of the American society, which altogether have traditionally been vitally important socio-cultural factors with key correlations into the political sphere of the country. Moreover, in a sub-chapter I also introduced and covered the topic of the new 21st century postmodern challenges facing the American and Western societies, in general. These are manifested in the form of identity-based policies and new, pseudo-religious progressive cultural trends and movements with rather comprehensive and deep impacts on social policies, and involving even foreign and security political implications.

Along the main thread of the thesis, I have searched for written evidences, political correlations, rhetoric demonstrations of my presumption that behind the foreign and security political discourse narratives of both President Reagan, senior and junior Bush as well as of Donald J. Trump can be spotted, identified manifestations of the American political ideas of mission, exceptionalism. These factors tend to be also intertwined with traces of religious piety and moral fundamentals. Among the latter principles reveal the zeal for world peace, balance of power theory with American dominance, the pro-Israel American foreign policies, the implementation of the Jerusalem Embassy Act, the sc. US-return to Central and East Europe, as well as the increase of deterring American force projection around the world.

The diverse sociocultural and family backgrounds just like the personal ambitions and aspirations of the examined American republican presidents had all their share and contribution to the development of their worldviews, mindset and set of ideas behind their thoughts and

actions when in the White House. Obviously, the highly theoretical clusters of ideas, religious and secular principles guiding the thoughts and actions of top executives can hardly be forced into strict categories and boxes of theories, which significantly hardens the tasks and research projects of analysts in this respect.

It is quite a commonly shared experience that the strict positivistic methods of natural sciences cannot be fully implemented or expected to function within the examination fields or analyses carried out in the dimension of humanities or social sciences, including intellectual history, international relations or security studies.

As it reveals from the summary-framing of the main findings below, I have pursued a twofold track aiming to justify my initial presumptions: first I examined the main theoretical characteristics so-called ideational, intellectual historical features of the worldviews of the chosen Republican presidents, then I have oriented and settled them within the context of foreign and security policies along the typologies and categories also applied by scholars of international relations and security studies.

5. A concise presentation of the thesis' findings

The personality traits, conceptuality and ideological framework of every republican president examined along the thesis altogether proved to be crucial factors when analyzing and main features of the policies or examining the composition of the state administration around the given president. Nonetheless, the rather bulky and overwhelming American bureaucratic apparatus around and below the President's Office also constitute quite a significant power tool in itself, taken the system resistance of the so-called 'deep state' or the vast network of departments and agencies, which tends to be a palpable experience in Washington D.C. even for the lord and staff of the White House. This renowned bureaucratic power structure manifests itself through different layers and positions, either featuring soft resistance, obedience or showing direct opposition to the policy measures, executive orders of the commander-in-chief, as most significantly and spectacularly it occurred during the first half of the presidency of Donald Trump, from both directions.¹²

¹² BERMAN, Russell: "The open plot to dismantle the federal government" In *The Atlantic. Politics*. Sept. 24, 2023.

Among the descriptive-analytical theories and approaches within international relations, the leaders' personality-based psychologic theories are also known, elaborated by Graham Allison or Margaret Hermann, which may affect and determine the features, directives of power structures and state administration led by a powerful public figure. I have consulted and partly adopted elements of these theories along my approach to the personality and conceptuality analyses of the American presidents. I have also undertaken a rather challenging task when analyzing the memoirs, decisions, speech acts of presidents and some of their aides through comparative content analytic methodology keeping in mind the features of constructivism, LTA and OPP models, as well, from the theories of international relations.

The liberal/conservative internationalism typology scale elaborated by Henry R. Nau also proved to be useful vantage point and element in my analysis regarding the categorization and framing of the foreign and security political ideas, strategies of the American presidents in the paradigm of international relations.

Following the comparative and analytic examination of the chosen American republican presidents, along the various manifestations of conservatism in the United States as well as the diverse theories and aspects of international relations, security studies and intellectual history, the following findings and framework observations can be drawn in the matter:

I. President Reagan: could be regarded and categorized as a so-called paleo-conservative president, who pursued a rather realist, or according to some experts neo-realist foreign policy against his soviet adversaries in Moscow, with the ultimate goal in mind to crush and defeat them both economically, ideologically and militarily, too. His economic policy, also nicknamed *Reagenomics* was deliberately neoliberal and showed traces of libertarianism along the idea of minimalist, non-interfering 'night-watchman state' he truly preferred.

According to some neoconservative ideologists and staff members of his cabinet, like Jeane Kirkpatrick or Norman Podhoretz, Ronald Reagan proved to be the 'first authentic neoconservative president', who in the same time was also a neorealist in contrast to the realism of Kissinger-Nixon and juxtaposing the liberal idealism of his predecessor President Carter¹³. Reagan, the conservative republican, though formerly a democrat from California, similarly to the pious neo-protestant Jimmy Carter, also considered important to undertake and represent

¹³ Cf. KIRKPATRICK Jeane: *The Reagan phenomenon – and other speeches on Foreign Policy*. Washington D.C., American Enterprise Institute, 1983 pp. 8 – 10, PODHORETZ, Norman: "Neoconservatism: a Eulogy". In *Commentary*. March, 1996, 22.

the idea of American core values and universal human rights in the world. Nevertheless, Reagan did not conduct this struggle for values and human rights zealously and blindly as Carter did, and, especially not by weakening friendly meek authoritarian regimes in Iran, Nicaragua or Chile, as his predecessor American administration would also mistakenly pursue in the 1970s.

Reagan fully agreed with his ambassador Kirkpatrick's assertion who claimed that this kind of Jimmy Carterian 'tepid self-renunciation proved to be the biggest, masochistic mistake from the part of America' since morality and national interest should not and cannot be separated¹⁴.

Stemming from Reagan's firm religious spirituality and his bipolar (rather Manichean) worldview, he considered communism as a genuinely diabolic ideology, which can be defeated both intellectually and physically (through economic and military power) and then finally landing it on 'the ash heap of history, where it truly belongs'. To achieve this the Americans would need nothing else but true will, firm moral stance and superiority as well as national pride and self-confidence that Reagan kept emphasizing through his speeches and acts during his time in office and even before and after. The wise political strategic recognition behind Reagan's idea of 'peace through strength' has been in effect ever since 1981 until the present moment in the foreign and defense political strategy of the United States.

The famed Reagan doctrine manifested its validity and efficiency against the Soviet Union, though officially it had never been proclaimed by Reagan himself, only carried out almost perfectly during his 8-year long presidency. Renown American defense projects, such as the SDI or the 'Star Wars' (with Edward Teller) and/or 'Operation ghost war' in Afghanistan, along with the arms reduction and limitation talks and treaties with the soviets, altogether proved to be the building blocks of the grand strategy scenario of President Reagan. These measures and projects indirectly drew the human race closer to stability, world peace and ultimately resulted in the gradual dissolution of the hostile power and downfall of the bipolar great-power structure system on the international stage. As Reagan envisaged these trends obviously benefited the United States, who remained the sole 'shining City upon a Hill'.

II. President George H.W.Bush: according to the above mentioned scaling he belonged to the conservative and realist category in terms of his ideas, intellectual affiliation and foreign political orientation. He clearly undertook and carried on the heritage of his predecessor and

¹⁴ KIRKPATRICK, Jeane: *Dictatorship and Double standards – rationalism and reason in politics*. New York: Simon&Schuster, 1982, pp. 23 – 52.

former mentor President Reagan with moderate conservatism and reserved religiosity, which altogether became Bush's benchmark label of a reliable, calm and intelligent top policy-maker. Bush also shared the viewpoint of president Reagan that the Soviet Union and the 'Red block' is evidently a 'dead-end street', while the American style liberal democracy may exist and prevail in the world only through moral and military might and resilience.¹⁵ For him, holding the highest public offices in the country meant to be a moral responsibility and burden in the same time, since in his view being a president also implied being a political and moral role model both for the nation and for the whole world. In senior Bush's viewpoint there was no public good or benevolent political action possible without firm religious moral fundamentals, which nonetheless could become self-justifying ethical obligations and habits of the mind. Furthermore, he gently but firmly rejected the religious zeal of the evangelical Christians, as merely philistine virtue signaling, including the case of his own elder son, junior George Bush, the born again Christian governor of Texas and the future president of the United States.

One of the pivotal points of his foreign political paradigm was to cope with the responsibilities and new forms of challenges resulting from the 'new world order' after the downfall of the Soviet bloc, and with the rise of new American super-power hegemony status within a more complex and unpredictable theatre of international relations.

III. President George W. Bush was a genuinely neoconservative (in contrast to his predecessors) politician who embraced and fulfilled the political objectives and presumptions of neoconservative think tanks about the powerful (even militant) assertion and spread of American liberal democratic values and interests in the world. As a 'born again Christian', following his spiritual awakening inspired by Billy Graham in 1985, junior Bush experienced a rather deep and comprehensive intellectual and spiritual paradigm shift, transformation. His worldview, similar to president Reagan's and senior Bush's ideas proved to be rather bipolar though harsher and more polarized, Manichean in terms of good and evil in life as well as on international stage. Evidently, the United States was supposed to be the positive hero in his paradigm, especially after 9/11, when the harmed American super power by divine providence had to face and fight all the external 'evil powers' threatening its existence. His controversial Manichean political stance resulted in the adoption of 'either with us or against us'-policy referring both to the leaders of 'rogue states', the Taliban, the al-Qaeda terrorists or to the unwilling European allies to join forces with the US in the 'global war on terror'. Bush renown

¹⁵ See COHEN, Warren I.: *The Cambridge history of American foreign relations – vol.IV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 119

political attitude and determination partly stemmed from the common personal features of born again Christians, also featured by theological assurance and belief in ultimate truth and justice on their side provided by providence. This worldview along with neoconservative ideas generated the emergence of the ‘postmodern American crusade’ of president Bush, which had rather controversial echoes not only in the Muslim world but among the American allied nations, as well¹⁶. As a consequence of the Manichean, polarizing militant foreign policy of the Bush administration, the acceptance and recognition rate of the United States in the world plummeted to record low popularity rates by the end of his presidency from a relatively high position of 70% after the tragedy of September 11¹⁷.

Following the drastically new style and attitude of the Democratic party president Barack Obama and his 8-year presidency, the American political arena was deeply shaken by the emergence of a political newcomer heralded by an eccentric real estate developer business mogul from New York, called Donald Trump.

IV. President Donald J. Trump, initially a Democratic Party supporter businessman from New York City landed on the American political stage as a sort of *deus ex machine* redeemer figure for the republicans after the two-cycle long Obama era. However his ascension to the highest office of the United States to the White House could not have occurred without the firm support of the conservative religious bloc of voters (particularly evangelicals) and (low)middle class, ‘blue-collared’ white Americans, who generally felt neglected and left behind by the bipartisan mostly liberal political elite in Washington D.C.¹⁸ Nevertheless, due to his plain communication style and controversial personality traits, Trump had become moreover unpopular and rejected by the right wing moderate conservative, liberal political elite of the Republican party. All the same, with the rise of the right winger ‘never Trumper’ critiques¹⁹, the number of pro-Trump supporters, common American voters from the ‘rust and Bible belt states’ of the US has shown significant increase. While his critiques blamed Trump for hijacking and ruthlessly exploiting the Grand Old Party’s reputation and influence upon American politics, Trump also managed to win a bit surprisingly the presidential election of 2016 against the former Secretary of State and First Lady Hillary Clinton. Furthermore, Trump

¹⁶ STARR, Paul: „The Presidents’ New Crusade” In *The American Prospect*, December 2003.

¹⁷ PEW Research Center: ‘Views of the US between 2002 – 2008’

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2008/06/12/chapter-2-views-of-the-u-s/> (accessed on: June 10, 2024)

¹⁸ PERRY, Samuel L.:”Why evangelicals went all in on Trump, again” In *Time*. January 24, 2024.

¹⁹ ROGERS, Tessa B.: „Revenge of the ‘never Trumbers’”, In *Time*. July 23, 2020.

ever since his ascent into high politics attracted not only millions of common folks into the Republican party's political domain but also lured influential big business partners from outside the sphere of the GOP , which can really make a difference in the world of political fundraising.²⁰

Trump's lavish lifestyle and superficial religiosity has not really reinforced and exemplified the American puritan ideals of public figures, also shared by many predecessors of his including Ronald Reagan or senior Bush. However, Trump tended to follow the example of his father in believing and adopting the message of 'prosperity gospel' as spread by pastor Normal V. Peale. The famous evangelist claimed that the sign of divine providence is primarily true faith along with spiritual as well as material abundance and wealth, a concept that resonated quite well with the ambitious business people of New York including the Trump family²¹.

The quasi narcissist personality traits, businesslike way of thinking and lavish lifestyle abundant in scandals of President Trump, have predestinated him into the special category of pseudo-conservative public figure. Notwithstanding, on the other hand it is important to emphasize that despite his superficial religious spirituality and philosophical mindset, President Trump full-heartedly undertook and represented the interests and values of his core voters, right wing, religious, conservative Christian and Jewish Americans, during his presidency. He adopted domestic as well as foreign policies favoring and benefitting topics and interests of outstanding importance for his conservative supporters, such as pro-life and anti-wokism, anti-progressive measures, support of churches and determined pro-Israel American foreign policy. The latter was primarily represented and conducted on behalf of the White House by the young, highly assertive son-in-law of President Trump, Jared Kushner of orthodox Jewish faith.

Based on his background and short-term political career, Donald Trump is meant to belong to the special non-conventional, out-of-the box type of newcomer (*parvenu*) political figures in history who undertake the responsibility and hurdles of the highest and most powerful office in the world without remuneration for reasons stemming from his personal ambitions, patriotic idea of mission, and outstanding devotion to perform something lasting and beneficial for his country and nation. His political creed reflects features of multi-source eclecticism, pragmatism with harshly patriotic and protectionist views (see the revisited MAGA slogan, with new customs tariffs and new international trade deals) as well as business trade-like 'transactionist'

²⁰ ULMER Alexandra, et al: „Who are the mega-rich donors backing Trump ?” In *Reuters*. April 2024.

²¹ SHOWALTER Brandon:„Trump is 'most stunning example of teh success of the Prosperity gospel' experts says” In *The Christian Post*. June 08, 2017

attitude, which demonstrated itself through Trump's diplomatic negotiations with Chinese, North Korean, Mexican or even with key-ally partners in Europe.

Regarding the foreign affairs and international security policies of Donald Trump he followed mostly the paths and guidelines of his predecessors in the White House with varying focus points and emphasis according to political strategies and ideas behind his policies in the matter. His neo-realistic political attitude during his presidency resembled the foreign political actions conducted by President George H.W. Bush, too, though in Trump's case with more emphatic protectionist attire. Within the concerning theoretical framework of international relations elaborated by Henry R. Nau, President Trump's foreign and security policies could as well be considered to belong to conservative internationalism, a category which has been confirmed by many experts in the discipline.²²

6. New scientific outcomes

In the first part of the thesis as per the tentative, highly theoretical nature of the work, I felt the need for a descriptive interpretive part of intellectual history and political philosophy so as to provide a better understanding of the nature of certain concepts and religiously and politically embedded ideas. Without the proper fundamentals on the nature of concepts and ideas in the matter, superficial analysts may be easily deceived or disoriented in the controversial common dimension of international relations, security studies and intellectual history of ideas. Furthermore, taken the genuinely theoretical, spiritual and non-materialistic nature of ideas and religious or secular concepts analyzed they cannot be grabbed and examined in a positivistic materialistic way and manner as it would be the case in natural sciences. However, this sort of intellectual investigation, socio-cultural and political examination of ephemeral principles tend to be prevalent in numerous political philosophical as well as in strategic concept analyses.

After the comprehensive analysis of the abundance of primary and secondary resources, state documents and speeches of top decision-makers in the matter, it has become strikingly valid and part of sensible reality the initial presumption of the hypothesis that the core ideas,

²² Cf. the remarks of CSIZMAZIA, Gábor in his doctoral thesis: Op.cit 2021, pp 242 – 246, as well as my previous articles in the matter.

theoretical concepts, or building blocks of the mindset of the presidents may directly affect their perspectives, political judgements, thus indirectly influence even the external reality itself.

The external power factors, such as asymmetric conflicts, war threats, security dilemmas between states or hostile political declarations, can as well influence the dimension of ideas and national interests within the same paradigm of the given principles. Namely, the Republican American presidents concerned at the end of the 20th century, proved to be rather unwilling to give up their core values and principles for the sake of appeasing the hostile Soviet Union and reach world peace status in the bipolar stage of international relations. Nevertheless, the leaders of the 'free world,' from their realistic stance in global affairs, did not wish to risk war escalation in open-end direct confrontation either with a hostile, unpredictable world power in order to avoid the 'unleashing the dogs of a war' in a nuclear Armageddon with mutually assured destruction.

As it reveals from the formerly confidential state documents and archival materials, the opposing super powers and their proxy allies during the half century of the Cold war used to live in a rather belligerent bipolar world, which was defined by mutual distrust, uncertainty and indiscriminate assertion of state interests along ideological and military coordinates. The Cold war hostilities were also featured by the fight and clash of opposing ideas along with tens of thousands of nuclear missiles from both parts, when the intellectual dimension of Western (classic) liberalism, Christian conservatism challenged the various materialistic doctrines and ideological manifestations of militant Marxism. The people of Central East European countries (Poles, Hungarians, Czechs) under the yoke of Soviet communism did recognize and knew the difference between the two world systems and ideologies, too well.

From the open-source primary documents available and related to the four American presidents in the analysis clearly reveals the observation that the following ideas, intellectual factors prove to be of outstanding importance for the top executives in the matter:

- 1.) the United States is a special country with exclusive goals and mission derived from divine providence among the nations of the world (even though the portion of the American society holding this assumption is gradually shrinking)
- 2.) religious belief, and Christianity in particular, tend to be the binding material in the fabric of American society and one important pillar of its political system with 'soft power' impact to the present days, though in a slightly regressive trend.

- 3.) the pseudo-religious American civil religion stands for similar power and influence on American social and political life as the transcendently rooted religions.
- 4.) the personal ethical actions of top politicians as political role-models are both similarly important in their private lives and when in high-position (this feature cannot be traced or identified in the case of President Trump though he does not share this idea in contrast to his great Republican predecessors).
- 5.) compared to the era heralded by the presidencies of Reagan and senior Bush, the primacy of traditional conservative ideas, values and their political dominance have significantly been altered and diminished in the first decades of the 21st century, facing new ideological and socio-cultural challenges from new progressive liberal trends.
- 6.) the impact power and influence of certain political ideas on external reality factors coming from behind the mindset of top political decision-makers tend to show direct correlations with the personal assertion, security perceptions and intellectual comprehension of presidents even in the dimension of international relations.
- 7.) the military, as the ultimate tool of political assertion of interests cannot be either exempt from the influence of political (or religious) ideas, let alone be patriotic principles, or retrograde motivational means serving controversial political goals (see the legitimizing power tools for the Iraqi and Afghan intervention and democracy-building projects of the American neoconservative decision-makers).

Based on the experiences and retrospective comprehension of past events and trends, the American social and political dimension demonstrate signs of dramatic ideological shifts and transformations, particularly within the political power bloc of the Democratic Party. The new Leftist, postmodern, progressive liberal challenges and trends do not let even the domains of foreign and security policies unaffected in the United States, which must be discussed and tackled with by American as well as foreign analysts and decision-makers. This kind of deeply rooted social, political transformational trends may threaten the social-political stability, coherence of the American civilization or, according to more pessimistic scenarios the 'progressive wokism' trend may jeopardize the super-power resilience and primacy of the United States in the second half of the 21st century. The slight and gradual decline of the American super power position, or even the perception of this controversial trend facing the external challengers may bear the capacity to alter reality and reshape the national security conditions, perception of such remote allied states as Hungary, too. The unfolding multipolar

international order may change the status quo and result in the emergence of old-new great power (Russia) or super-power (China) structures on the stage of multi-polarizing international relations.

7. Recommendations and the practical use of research findings

The novelty of the thesis manifests in the interdisciplinary approach of the new topic per se, moreover through the specific correlations and interpretations elaborated and demonstrated by the content analytical paper. In the concerning thematic Hungarian academic literature and domain on the United States, there has not been elaborated any similar academic study, or thesis of this kind in terms of length, depth and comprehensive analysis on the four American presidents, with special focus on the intellectual historical, political philosophical correlations and their foreign and security policies and ways of thinking.

Based on highly theoretical approach and comprehensive ‘ideational’ analysis, I demonstrated that certain ideas and concepts – let it be religious, semi-religious or political in nature – proved to be significantly important within and behind the political thinking, mindset of the chosen American republican presidents with particular focus on their foreign and security policies. In the case of President Trump this presumption could not be justified or fully demonstrated concerning the special nexus of religiously rooted ideas and his foreign and security political thinking. The major scientific findings of the thesis paper are the following one:

- 1.) along the comprehensive comparative content analysis, I justified the presumptions of the two major hypotheses claiming that certain set of ideas, and the special American concept of idea of mission and exceptionalism have been significant or even crucial contributing factors to the policies and political attitude of the chosen presidents, with various depths and level of importance in the matter.
- 2.) I demonstrated that the ideas of civilizational mission, stemming from religious spirituality and the American civil religions environment proved to be almost pivotal, major features of the policies and strategic thinking of President Reagan and George W. Bush particularly while in the case of senior Bush it had a much lesser

importance and influence on his political concepts besides the prevailing realistic attitude.

- 3.) President Donald Trump, labelled as pragmatist, realist and business-centric ‘transactionist or CEO-president’, concerning his political attire and decision-making style, (especially in foreign policy), can also be linked with Christian spirituality, which might define his political actions yet on a smaller and limited extent. He has also shown distinguished respect towards the American civilization and cultural accomplishments and also expressing the outstanding and dominant role, duty and mission of the United States among the nations of the world.
- 4.) Based on my initial presumptions stated in the hypotheses, I collected evidences and demonstrated that certain religious and semi-religious principles, political ideas proved to be essential moral grounds and vantage points for the American republican presidents in question. These set of ideas constituted the moral and political philosophical fundamentals of the top decision-makers, moreover they proved to be even more influential and important than external political factors, sometimes even hindering and overshadowing their pragmatic desire for appeasement and cooperation. Thus, I justified the assumption that in great politics, besides the evident economic, national security and political set of interests and factors, the pivotal impact of certain ideas (religious principles, national myths, which altogether shape the worldviews and mindset of presidents), cannot and should not be disregarded or neglected.

According to the results summarized above, my thesis also revealed new pathways and results in interdisciplinary approach towards history of political ideas and the impact of ideas on foreign and security policy-making in the overlapping dimension of international relations and security studies.

Concerning the practical utility of the thesis the descriptive analysis and the broad, comprehensive conclusions derived from the special natures, features of American foreign and security policies as well as on the decision-making mechanisms and intellectual fundamentals of the republican presidents may be useful resources and vantage points for several experts, foreign political decision-makers or consultants in Hungary. My findings may as well provide beneficial fundamentals and rewarding theoretical guidelines to both policy experts and laymen, who wish to get a better and deeper understanding of American foreign political thinking and civilizational issues at the turn of the 3rd millennium.

Nowadays, topics of this kind on the influence of various intellectual factors should be taken into consideration both by decision-makers and analysts more significantly, when diverse postmodern challenges, new socio-cultural trends and progressive ideas loom upon Western societies involving the foreign and security political domains, too. Similar intellectual investigations may be beneficial in contrast to the swiftly unfolding dominance of technology-based scientism and other secular, pseudo-religious progressive ideas in the 21st century, which will constitute a new cluster of problems on their own in the Western world.

8. List of relevant scientific publications of the author

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- 3) CSUTAK, Zsolt: „Reagan elnök ’csillagháborús terve’ és a ’gonosz birodalma’ beszéd 40 év távlatából” In *Újkor.hu. Világtörténelem*. 2023. Március
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- 13) CSUTAK, Zsolt: „Az amerikai-magyar diplomáciai kapcsolatok korai története” In *Újkor.hu Világtörténelem.* 2021. augusztus.
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- 16) CSUTAK, Zsolt: „Churchill fultoni beszéde: előzmények és utóhatások” In *Újkor.hu. Világtörténelem.* 2021. március.
- 17) CSUTAK, Zsolt: „A wilsoni elvek hatása Magyarországra, különösképpen Masaryk amerikai tevékenysége tükrében.” Barna Attila (szerk.): *Trianon 100. Tanulmányok a békeszerződés centenáriuma.* Budapest, Ludovika, 2021.
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9. Professional curriculum vitae of the author

Zsolt Csutak was born in 1976 in Székelyudvarhely, Transylvania, Romania, where he had also attended his schools. After graduation from high-school, Zsolt got admission to the Faculty of Arts of the renowned University of Szeged, where he started his university studies at the newly established Department of American Studies under the intellectual leadership of professor Rozsnyai and Vajda. Besides American studies major, Zsolt was also admitted to Philosophy major. However, later he swapped Philosophy to studying another new discipline in Hungary at that time, that was Political Theory as well as another special minor course, European Studies, which was also initiated at the university in 1996.

His scholarly interests, zeal and immersion into the analysis of US intellectual and political history, foreign and security policies earned him shared 2nd prize at the National Students' Science Competition (OTDK) of 1999 at the University of Pécs. In the meantime, in the fall of 1996 he had also started to attend the correspondence minor of teachers' training of religious studies of the Protestant Theological University of Debrecen, Faculty of Teacher Training at Szeged. With the help of a Lutheran church denomination from Virginia, USA and through the Hungarian Reformed Church of Upper-Manhattan, New York City, in the summer of 1997 Zsolt managed to visit the United States, also with a quick visit to Canada.

In 1997-98 Zsolt also completed the Political analyst special course of *Deák Ferenc* Political College at Lakitelek People's College.

During his university years at Szeged, Zsolt was an active member of Szeged university life, also as a coordinator of the Students Council's Committee of Foreign Affairs. As a youth representative he took part in several youth training camps, international conferences within the framework of the Council of Europe's Youth Directorate in Strasbourg, both as a participant and a trainer in countries like France, Cyprus, Hungary or Moldova. Zsolt had also obtained an invitation and Erasmus study program opportunity to the prestigious *SciencesPo* University in Paris in 2000 that he could not start due to unfortunate external factors. He also participated in many landmark regional events, trilateral international conferences held in Szeged on regional security policies during the years of the war in Yugoslavia, between 1998 and 2001.

After graduating from the University of Szeged, American Studies (MA), Political and European Studies (BAs) programs in 2001, Zsolt left the academic world temporarily, though

for more than a decade, working as a European tour guide for a world-class Swiss-American travel company in the summer time, and as an English teacher during the winters.

However, the intellectual lure of the academic sphere and scholarly activities did not cease to exist for him, either, thus he rejoined the world of higher education in 2017, when he had the opportunity to join the Doctoral School of Military Sciences International security studies domain at Ludovika-University of Public Service.

Zsolt Csutak attended and completed his doctoral studies at Ludovika University with great zeal and outstanding academic performance. His scholarly accomplishment is genuinely reflected through more than 50 scientific articles, 5 book chapters, and dozens of scientific international conferences that he attended both as a participant and as a presenter. As a doctoral student he had also gained Hungarian student researchers' state scholarship or ÚNKP for the examination of NATO strategies in 2018. In the following year he spent some months at Kent State University, Ohio, thanks to a Fulbright scholarship that he obtained to the USA.

At Ludovika University, Zsolt joined the newly established America Research Institute in 2018 as externally affiliate researcher. Since 2020 he has also been working as an external research fellow of the recently founded Religion and Society Research Institute of Eötvös József Research Center of the university. Besides his academic position, he is a high school teacher of English civilizational studies as well as a mentor at Milestone Institute, Budapest.

Zsolt Csutak is a member of several scientific organizations, such as: Hungarian Association of Military Science; Hungarian Political Science Society; Hungarian Association of American Studies; American Hungarian Educators' Association; Fulbright Alumni Association.

In 2023 he passed the comprehensive C-type Hungarian national security background check.

His foreign language knowledge includes: English: advanced C2, Romanian and French: intermediate B1, Italian: beginner A2.