

US Hegemony and the Trans-Pacific Partnership: Consensus, Crisis, and Common Sense

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Abstract: This article provides a critical analysis of the agency of the United States in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Building on neo-Gramscian theory, it contextualises the US decision to withdraw from the TPP as an expression of hegemonic crisis. Through an examination of the strategic and geoeconomic logics and objectives of the trade agreement in US foreign economic policy, it maintains that the TPP was intended primarily to expand the structural and consensual power of the United States in the international political economy. Partly an attempt to kick-start a stalled neoliberal agenda, the TPP was also an effort to respond to China's growing influence in trade governance. The article argues that, despite the revival of the TPP in the form of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the inability of elite networks in the United States to implement the original accord is illustrative of a crisis of hegemony driven largely by the collapse of the 'common sense' in favour of economic globalisation.

On its signing in 2016, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was slated to become the world's largest trade pact. The product of a multilateral quest for a 'high-quality', 'twenty-first century' agreement,¹ the TPP was largely 'Made in America', in the Obama administration's slogan for the accord. Comprising 12 countries (Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States, and Vietnam) that totalled over one-third of global gross domestic product (GDP), the TPP was negotiated and finalized under the leadership of the United States. The US's withdrawal in January 2017 cast doubt on the future of the regime, which had yet to be ratified. The remaining 11 countries moved forward with a modified version of the agreement, called the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The unforeseen 'rise and fall and rise' of the regime suggested an appetite for further (neo)liberalization irrespective of US participation.²

Much of the scholarship on the US withdrawal from the TPP has focused on the implications for the 'liberal world order', the postwar international system built largely by the US and held together by multilateral institutions, which reputedly entered a 'deep crisis' as a result of Trump's election and Britain's vote to exit the European Union.³ Along with the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the TPP was at the center of the Obama administration's efforts to extend and deepen the liberal order, albeit in a way that served US geostrategic interests.⁴ The Trump administration's decision to leave the TPP

¹ C. L. Lim, Deborah K. Elms, and Patrick Low, eds., *The Trans-Pacific Partnership: A Quest for a Twenty-First Century Trade Agreement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); John Ravenhill, 'The Political Economy of the Trans-Pacific Partnership: A "21st Century" Trade Agreement?' *New Political Economy*, Vol. 22, No. 5 (2017), pp. 573-94.

² Tom Chodor, 'The Rise and Fall and Rise of the Trans-Pacific Partnership: 21st Century Trade Politics through A New Constitutionalist Lens', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2019), pp. 232-55.

³ G. John Ikenberry, Inderjeet Parmar, and Doug Stokes, 'Introduction: Ordering the World? Liberal Internationalism in Theory and Practice', *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (2018), p. 1.

⁴ Matteo Dian, 'The Strategic Value of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Consequences of Abandoning it for the US Role in Asia', *International Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 5 (2017), pp. 583-97; Crister S. Garrett, 'Constructing

became a potent symbol of its hostility to this wider order.⁵ Some scholars noted that the US abandonment of the TPP created an opening for China to entrench its competitor agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).⁶ Insofar as the US has historically been bound up in this system as a ‘stabilizer’, Washington’s departure from the TPP raised questions about the future of US structural power and the governance of the liberal order.⁷ And yet, the perseverance of the (CP)TPP would seem to indicate that the order itself may be more resilient than the place of American leadership within it. For Ikenberry, it is the very adaptability of this multilateral system, including its trade agreements and institutions, which will ensure its survival through an age of rising powers.⁸ The ‘organizing ideas and impulses of liberal internationalism run deep in world politics’, argues Ikenberry,⁹ suggesting that, despite its current problems, the liberal order is not on the verge of collapse.

The United States’ abandoned stewardship of the TPP presents something of a puzzle for International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE) scholarship. For decades, there was a strong bipartisan consensus that free trade agreements were in the US

Narratives of Global Order: The Obama Presidency, TPP, TTIP, and the Contested Politics of Geoeconomics’, *Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2019), pp. 261-81; Melissa K. Griffith, Richard H. Steinberg, and John Zysman, ‘From Great Power Politics to a Strategic Vacuum: Origins and Consequences of TPP and TTIP’, *Business and Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2017), pp. 573-92; Jianren Zhou, ‘Power Transition and Paradigm Shift in Diplomacy: Why China and the US March towards Strategic Competition?’ *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2019), pp. 1-34.

⁵ Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order*, second edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), pp. 135-6; G. John Ikenberry, ‘The Plot against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive?’ *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (2017), p. 4; Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper, ‘The Day after Trump: American Strategy for a New International Order’, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2018), p. 15; John Peterson, ‘Present at the Destruction? The Liberal Order in the Trump Era’, *The International Spectator*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (2018), pp. 28, 36.

⁶ Naná De Graaff and Bastiaan Van Apeldoorn, ‘US–China Relations and the Liberal World Order: Contending Elites, Colliding Visions?’ *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (2018), p. 119.

⁷ Doug Stokes, ‘Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (2018), pp. 134, 148.

⁸ G. John Ikenberry, ‘Why the Liberal World Order will Survive’, *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2018), pp. 17-29.

⁹ G. John Ikenberry, ‘The End of Liberal International Order?’ *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (2018), p. 8.

national interest. Within a relatively short amount of time, US trade policy was upended. The consensus was replaced by a crisis that extended beyond trade governance, and which called into question the status and purpose of US agency in the international political economy. The TPP featured both liberal-institutionalist and realist-geostrategic dimensions/rationales, but the dominant, statist strands of realism and liberalism are ill-equipped to explicate both the origins of the TPP *and* its eventual uncoupling from US hegemonic power. How did a weakening free trade consensus cohere in the case of the TPP? How was the consensus on the TPP transformed into a crisis of hegemony? An alternative view is needed, one that can account for the class dynamics underpinning the TPP, but which simultaneously acknowledges the agreement's significance as a geoeconomic project of US statecraft.

In contrast to the liberal order literature, this paper argues that the TPP is best viewed as a project of US hegemonic power in the world economy. The US withdrawal from the agreement is symptomatic of a crisis of US hegemony. Although the scholarship on the liberal order acknowledges the US role in creating, leading, and sustaining this system,¹⁰ the dominant framing of this order tends to affix this hegemony to that of a relatively benign 'liberal leviathan',¹¹ with a concomitant focus on the openness and public goods created under the aegis of US security and foreign economic policy. As Parmar argues, however, 'liberal internationalism' serves as a 'legitimizing ideology' as much as a theoretical explanation for the existence of this order, which encompasses 'a class-based, elitist hegemony' reflected in 'both US domestic and foreign relations'.¹² In the context of the multitude of definitions of hegemony that span IR and IPE, the concept is most

¹⁰ Acharya, *The End of American World Order*; Ikenberry, Parmar, and Stokes, 'Introduction: Ordering the World?'; Stokes, 'Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order'.

¹¹ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

¹² Inderjeet Parmar, 'The US-led Liberal Order: Imperialism by Another Name?' *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (2018), pp. 151-2.

parsimoniously understood as a dialectical social process involving asymmetrical power relations, wherein the hegemon is able to ‘absorb’ challenges to its pre-eminence.

Importantly, this process is grounded in class dynamics, and shaped not only by states but by other agents operating within the hegemony-resistance dialectic.

This paper provides a critical analysis of US agency in the Trans-Pacific Partnership. It utilizes a neo-Gramscian theoretical approach to foreground the multiple forms of power that constitute US hegemony while simultaneously acknowledging the class-based interests that motivate US policy. I maintain that the TPP was primarily a project of American hegemony intended to reinforce and extend the structural and consensual power of the US in the global economy. The paper thus examines the strategic and geoeconomic objectives of the agreement from the perspective of US foreign policy. Following this, the paper contextualizes the United States’ decision to withdraw from the accord, which, I argue, represents a crisis created by an eclectic challenge to the elite ‘common sense’ on trade and globalization.

The research design underpinning the paper flows from its conceptual and theoretical foundations. The neo-Gramscian view of hegemony as a dialectical social process requires an analysis that blends ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ factors and considerations. This entails situating agents (from political leaders to various class formations) in pre-existing structures.¹³ The framework is based on a critical content analysis of state policy as an outcome that refracts the competing interests of capital and its subordinates.¹⁴ To ascertain the agential motivations behind the TPP, I consulted a range of official statements, documents, and policy reports, including from the White House, the Office of the US Trade

¹³ David Marsh, ‘Marxism’, in David Marsh and Gerry Stoker, eds., *Theories and Methods in Political Science*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 153-71.

¹⁴ Colin Hay, ‘Marxism and the State’, in Andrew Gamble, David Marsh, and Tony Tant, eds., *Marxism and Social Science* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 152-174.

Representative (USTR), and the Congressional Research Service (CRS). To become hegemonic, political consensus needs broader sedimentation in society. With this in mind, I also engaged with the broader policy discourse on the TPP, as represented through think-tank reporting, the advocacy of business and civil society groups, and the input of ‘stakeholders’ into the negotiation process. The debate reflected changing public attitudes as officials adjusted the presentation of trade policy based on the opposition of actors challenging economic globalization, from labor unions to far-right activists. Reporting on polling data was consulted to corroborate the emerging dissensus.

In addition, the analysis makes considerable use of leaked diplomatic cables published via WikiLeaks. As argued by Daniel Drezner following the 2010 ‘Cablegate’ episode, in which approximately 250,000 State Department documents were published online, these cables presented ‘only a partial picture of foreign-policy decision-making’ because they didn’t encompass the views of key agencies like the Defense Department or National Security Council.¹⁵ At the same time, ‘the published communications offered a fascinating perspective on international diplomacy’.¹⁶ The disclosure of secret and classified materials provided a ‘behind-the-scenes’ picture (however incomplete) of official discussions on the TPP during the transition from the Bush to Obama administrations. The cables often summarized conversations with non-US officials. They provided a means of gauging the strategic thinking behind US efforts to bring the TPP to fruition. In 2014 and 2015, WikiLeaks published secret TPP negotiations and working-chapters,¹⁷ leading to the public dissemination of some materials. Information from leaked documents was triangulated in conjunction with the official sources mentioned above. Although diplomatic cables cannot provide a bottom up

¹⁵ Daniel Drezner, ‘Why WikiLeaks Is Bad for Scholars’, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 December 2010, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-WikiLeaks-Is-Bad-for/125628>.

¹⁶ Benedetta Brevini, ‘WikiLeaks: Between Disclosure and Whistle-Blowing in Digital Times’, *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2017), p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

vantage, they do reflect elite views on the political challenges associated with foreign policy projects, providing echoes of popular opinion as interpreted in official perspectives.

Fuelled by contradictory ‘populist’ forces, embodied partly by Trumpian nationalism but also by resistance to the TPP’s neoliberalism, the broad-based opposition to the agreement lacked a coherent political or ideological position. Nevertheless, it served to undermine the neoliberal, ‘globalist’ consensus in favor of the accord. The United States’ U-turn on the TPP suggests that IPE would be well-served to better account for the role of mass publics in the governance of the world economy. What matters in the construction of hegemonic consensus is the resonance between elite ‘common sense’ and that of popular sectors. Following Hopf’s (constructivist-based) intervention to restore common sense to a central role in neo-Gramscian conceptions of hegemony,¹⁸ the article suggests that critical theoretical approaches need to better attend to challenges that fall short of fully-articulated counter-hegemonic movements or ‘wars of position’, but which take more idiosyncratic, inchoate, and incongruous forms.

On crisis and common sense: A neo-Gramscian approach to US hegemony

This paper builds on neo-Gramscian approaches in IR and IPE. This tradition can be traced to the influential work of Robert W. Cox. His triangular model of hegemony comprised material capabilities, ideas, and institutions,¹⁹ setting the social forces of production against, respectively, specific state-forms and the structures of ‘world order’ itself.²⁰ If Coxian theory represented an important move away from overly-statist approaches to hegemony, it was

¹⁸ Ted Hopf, ‘Common-sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics’, *International Organization*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (2013), p. 318.

¹⁹ Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

²⁰ Robert W. Cox, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

complemented by the cognate scholarship of Stephen Gill,²¹ William Robinson,²² and Mark Rupert,²³ who problematized the role of the United States' foreign policy in the 'actually existing' global capitalist order. A common theme in this literature was the argument that US power was interwoven with an increasingly globalized capitalism. On the puzzle of the US's abandoned stewardship of the TPP, then, a Coxian, critical view problematizes the class dynamics that are largely elided in more conventional accounts of the mega-trade deal.

Contrary to mainstream views, neo-Gramscianism offers a critique of the dominant understanding of the relationship between US foreign policy and the global capitalist relations that are constitutive of this postwar system. Against the assumptions of stability and legitimacy implicit in conventional discussions of the liberal *order*, this tradition takes hegemony to be a multifaceted and multilayered *social relationship*. The analytical utility of hegemony, in this view, stems from its ability to bring together various facets of international relations, helping to bridge the divide between IR and IPE while putting hegemony 'in motion' as a dialectical process of socio-political 'negotiation'. Building explicitly on Gramsci, Cox's historicized approach implied a dynamic, contested legitimization of asymmetrical power relations closely connected to class dynamics within and across nation-states.²⁴ Hegemony blends coercion, consensus, and ideological legitimation to cut across the structures, institutions, and discourses of international relations. In other words, it interweaves multiple forms of power, which operate simultaneously to reproduce the (pre-existing) advantages of leading actors, including states. This isn't all 'one way traffic',

²¹ Stephen Gill, *Power and Resistance in the New World Order*, 2nd. (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

²² William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²³ Mark Rupert, *Producing Hegemony: The Politics of Mass Production and American Global Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mark Rupert, 'Globalising Common Sense: A Marxian-Gramscian (Re-)Vision of the Politics of Governance/Resistance', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 29, No. S1 (2003), pp. 181-98.

²⁴ Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order*; Cox, *Approaches to World Order*.

however; the internal dialectic allows subordinate forces to push back against the consensus favored by dominant agents.

In contradistinction to Cox's 'internationalized state'²⁵ and Robinson's 'transnational state',²⁶ this article focuses on the hegemony of the US. Its desiderata pertain to the strategic value of the TPP, its relationship to US power, and the implications of Trump's withdrawal. The US has long maintained a leadership position in the global capitalist economy. This allowed Washington to advance policies in its own discrete national interests even as it attended to the institutional stability of global capitalism. There are differences within the critical IPE literature regarding the precise role of US power vis-à-vis the different 'levels' of national/global capitalism. Stokes and Raphael contend that US foreign economic policy evidences a 'dual logic' in which Washington pursues the interests of its own national capital while simultaneously consolidating an international system in the interests of transnational capital writ large.²⁷ This is consistent with a view of US hegemony as a social process, based principally on class dynamics transposed onto the realm of international politics. The United States' foreign policy has generally been legitimated through an Americanist ideology emphasizing the (elite and popular) 'common sense' appeal of liberalism alongside tenuous and sometimes contradictory notions of exceptionalism.²⁸

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci wrote that hegemony 'supposes an intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality that has gone beyond common sense and has

²⁵ Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order*.

²⁶ William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); William I. Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁷ Doug Stokes and Sam Raphael, *Global Energy Security and American Hegemony* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. 15, 35-8.

²⁸ Eugene Augelli and Craig Murphy, *America's Quest for Supremacy in the Third World: A Gramscian Analysis* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1988), pp. 35-71.

become, if only within narrow limits, a critical conception'.²⁹ Common sense, for Gramsci, meant a 'traditional' and/or 'popular conception of the world'.³⁰ Far from static or given, however, this was political terrain; elites attempting to align common sense beliefs with their own material interests often find opposition from 'below'. As noted by Raymond Williams, hegemony 'is seen to depend for its hold not only on its expression of the interests of a ruling class but also on its acceptance as "normal reality" or "common sense" by those in practice subordinate to it'.³¹ 'Popular common sense', for Gramsci, was not 'monolithic or univocal', but 'an amalgam of historically effective ideologies, scientific doctrines and social mythologies' that could 'become a ground of struggle'.³² Gramscian common sense spans different socio-political levels; it is sedimented into subordinate actors based on the interests of an existing 'historic bloc'. If it is well-balanced, common sense brings together popular, mass-based conceptions of morality and goodness (what Gramsci referred to as 'folklore') with the ideology (or 'philosophy') of the historic bloc's ruling-class.³³ Gramsci suggested that common sense can be productive of what he referred to as the 'national-popular' point of view.³⁴ However, shifts in popular common sense can destabilize hegemony, creating crisis conditions and compelling dominant groups to utilize other forms of power to maintain their structural advantages.

Addressing the crisis of the Bretton Woods system in the 1970s, Cox wrote that 'hegemony is more than dominance', as it is largely an 'intersubjective sharing of behavioural expectations. A leading nation's conception of the world becomes universalized to the point where its own

²⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 333-4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-9.

³¹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988 [1976]), p. 145.

³² Rupert, 'Globalising Common Sense', p. 185.

³³ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 419; Michele Filippini, *Using Gramsci: A New Approach* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), p. 20.

³⁴ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 422.

leaders stand by the universalized principles where they conflict with particularistic domestic interests'. Thus, 'the evidence for a decline of hegemony is to be sought less in the loss of power than in the tendency toward unilateralism in furtherance of specific interests'.³⁵ Cox's work on inter-subjectivity and ideational factors helped open up the fields of IR and IPE in accordance with the discursive turn of recent decades. Yet, in the context of hegemonic crises specifically, Cox underappreciated and generally overlooked the bottom-up and 'everyday' factors that can push a hegemonic state away from universalism and toward particularism. For example, political battles in the US over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) pitted a bipartisan neoliberal establishment against an assortment of 'anti-globalization' groups, spanning the radical left, environmentalists, and labor unions and 'far right' nationalist organizations, which, albeit for differing purposes, sought a rejection of these agreements.³⁶ While unsuccessful in 'defeating' NAFTA or the WTO, these variegated movements represented a backlash to neoliberal globalization that opened up cracks in the 'common sense' consensus on 'free trade'.

In historical materialist ontology, hegemonic crises originate in the structural antinomies of capitalist production, which take on differing characteristics as these tensions are mediated via competing political forces. Gramsci used the term 'organic crisis' to capture the notion of a comprehensive breakdown of the hegemonic order, in which dominant classes struggle to assert their will due to a concomitant 'crisis of authority'.³⁷ The contemporary global crisis, write Bieler and Morton, is a product of the internal relations of global capitalism, and more

³⁵ Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, p. 245.

³⁶ Mark Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization: Contending Visions of a New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2000); Gill, *Power and Resistance in the New World Order*, pp. 237-48.

³⁷ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 210-18; Stephen Gill, 'Organic Crisis, Global Leadership and Progressive Alternatives', in Stephen Gill, ed., *Global Crises and the Crisis of Global Leadership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 233-54.

specifically the ‘uneven and combined development’ experienced during and after the 2007-08 financial meltdown, Great Recession, Eurozone contagion, and accompanying policies of austerity.³⁸ An appreciation of ‘class agency’ is needed to grasp the ways in which structural uncertainties are navigated dialectically – and how they produce contrary strategies and social and political movements from ‘above’ and ‘below’.³⁹ Gramsci pointed to ‘conjunctural’ phenomena that (indirectly) steer periods of uncertainty toward different political outcomes.⁴⁰ In this way, organic crises are composed of various intersecting crises at different layers of the hegemonic relationship.⁴¹ These can appear through the rejection of specific projects meant to stabilize or augment relations of hegemony.

In other words, structural tensions are often made manifest in the quotidian realities of popular classes attempting to navigate rapidly-shifting economic, social, and political environments. When it comes to analyzing the contingencies of crisis, then, and despite very different ontological commitments, strands of constructivist and ‘everyday’ IPE can complement the neo-Gramscian approach.⁴² As stated by Mark Blyth, ‘what constitutes an economic crisis as a crisis is not a self-apparent phenomenon... Agents must argue over, diagnose, proselytize, and impose on others their notion of what a crisis actually is before collective action to resolve the uncertainty facing them can take any meaningful institutional form’.⁴³ As with economic crises, the tensions inherent in hegemony only become full-blown crises when they are commonly understood as such by relevant agents. Elites and

³⁸ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); see also, Gill, ‘Organic Crisis, Global Leadership and Progressive Alternatives’.

³⁹ Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis*, pp. 41-6.

⁴⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 177-85.

⁴¹ Gill, ‘Organic Crisis, Global Leadership and Progressive Alternatives’, p. 234.

⁴² Hopf, ‘Common-sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics’. For a countervailing argument, see Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis*, pp. 52-67.

⁴³ Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 9.

(subordinate groups within) mass publics will generally take different paths to reach such an understanding, altering the common sense foundations of hegemony in an ideological sense.

In their effort to critique materialist approaches to crisis, agent-centered constructivist accounts focus on the endogenous processes that give meaning to ‘unsettled times’ and allow agents – in elite-sectors and the broader population – to make sense of ‘critical junctures’.⁴⁴ In response, historical materialists stress the materiality of ideas and the internal relations in the material structure of ideology, relating processes of social and discursive construction to actors concretely positioned in pre-existing material structures. Gramscian ‘common sense’ possesses both ideological and material dimensions. It necessarily links political leaders with mass publics. Despite being overlooked in Coxian critical theory,⁴⁵ this understanding of ‘common sense’ is a critical feature of hegemony in the contemporary international political economy. Although elite ideas constitute the specific policies used to maintain and/or extend hegemonic relationships, these ideas need to find continual resonance with mass/popular common sense. Material shocks can ‘break’ this resonance.

A breakdown in mass common sense allows an elite consensus to be more readily challenged from below. A nascent politics of rejection can have contradictory expressions, as witnessed in the boom in eclectic variations of ‘populism’ that emerged in the wake of the 2007-09 financial crash and Great Recession.⁴⁶ This created an assortment of challenges to commonsensical thinking of the ‘establishment’, coming from disaffected groups across the

⁴⁴ Wesley W. Widmaier, Mark Blyth, and Leonard Seabrooke, ‘Exogenous Shocks or Endogenous Constructions? The Meanings of Wars and Crises’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (2007), p. 749.

⁴⁵ Hopf, ‘Common-sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics’.

⁴⁶ John B. Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016); Ikenberry, Parmar, and Stokes, ‘Introduction: Ordering the World?’; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, ‘Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The *Silent Revolution* in Reverse’, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2017), pp. 443-54.

political spectrum.⁴⁷ A broad-based pushback against hegemonic projects need not entail a fully-fledged emancipatory movement or coherent ‘war of position’, in Gramscian terms. Counter-hegemony in this context can take a more ‘everyday’ form,⁴⁸ expressed not only in organized social movements but through more habitual aspects of daily life. This, in turn, can impact various kinds of socio-political agency, including through mediums of public opinion, electoral and party participation, and voting behavior.

An elite consensus on free trade

In the globalization debates of the 1990s and 2000s, neo-Gramscianism was vital in problematizing the consensual features of the Washington Consensus,⁴⁹ a policy framework that linked trade liberalization with fiscal discipline, tax reform, privatization, deregulation, and enhanced private property rights.⁵⁰ Free trade was pursued vigorously as a means of codifying and propelling neoliberalization. In US politics, it enjoyed the strong backing of both major political parties and the wider foreign policy establishment. This was evident in the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton, who adopted a neoliberal approach to domestic and foreign economic policy that echoed the Republican Party’s more enthusiastic ‘market fundamentalism’. Although Clinton’s efforts to advance globalization were resisted

⁴⁷ Kate Crehan, *Gramsci’s Common Sense: Inequality and its Narratives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁴⁸ John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke, eds., *Everyday Politics of the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Adam David Morton, ‘Peasants as Subaltern Agents in Latin America: Neoliberalism, Resistance and the Power of the Powerless’, in John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke, eds., *Everyday Politics of the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 120-38; James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁴⁹ Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*; Gill, *Power and Resistance in the New World Order*.

⁵⁰ John Williamson, ‘A Short History of the Washington Consensus’, in Narcis Serra and Joseph E. Stiglitz, eds., *The Washington Consensus Reconsidered: Towards a New Global Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 14-30.

by his ‘base’, he consolidated a bipartisan coalition in favor of free trade,⁵¹ a pattern which held for the George W. Bush and Obama presidencies.

Indeed, for decades, the elite common sense on free trade in the United States produced a robust commitment to trade liberalization that spanned presidential administrations and commanded legislative majorities in Congress.⁵² The trade policies championed by Washington were constitutive of an increasingly neoliberal and globalized capitalism, reinforcing the US’s structural advantages in the world economy. This multifaceted commitment to free trade encompassed policies at different levels of the international political economy: global/multilateral, regional, and bilateral.⁵³ Trade policy was perceived as crucial to the process of ‘liberal order building’ characterized by rules-based political cooperation and open economic exchange. The creation of NAFTA, the WTO, and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum were cornerstones of this agenda.⁵⁴ For critical scholars, the interlinking of trade liberalization to the other policies of the Washington Consensus mean that ‘free trade’ benefitted not only US power in a national sense but, more to the point, certain elite groups within the United States.⁵⁵

In the post-Cold War era, the United States was responsible for a series of trade agreements designed to enhance its structural power in the world economy. The US was integral in transforming the postwar General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade into the more

⁵¹ Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization*, pp. 143-5.

⁵² Congressional Research Service, ‘International Trade and Finance: Overview and Issues for the 115th Congress’, 21 December 2016.

⁵³ Simon J. Evenett and Michael Meier, ‘An Interim Assessment of the US Trade Policy of “Competitive Liberalization”’, *The World Economy*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2008), pp. 31-66.

⁵⁴ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 223.

⁵⁵ Gill, *Power and Resistance in the New World Order*; Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy Of American Empire* (London: Verso, 2012); Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization*; Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Naná de Graaff, ‘Corporate Elite Networks and U.S. Post-Cold War Grand Strategy from Clinton to Obama’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2014), pp. 29-55.

comprehensive WTO, formed through the Uruguay Round, completed in 1994. However, the subsequent Doha Round (or Doha Development Round [DDR]), launched in 2001, stagnated and eventually broke down under the weight of contentious issues ranging from agricultural subsidies to services.⁵⁶ Other pathways to liberalization needed clearing. The US saw regional arrangements such as APEC and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) as the next best option.⁵⁷ These were moulded largely on NAFTA, as were the various FTAs the US completed on a bilateral or sub-regional basis. But, like the DDR talks themselves, and in contrast to NAFTA and many bilateral FTAs, the agenda and scale of the APEC and FTAA agreements threw up an array of terminable problems at the multilateral level. Meanwhile, the Doha stalemate illustrated the growing importance of ‘rising powers’ in trade governance.⁵⁸ As an alternate and in some ways scaled-back hegemonic project, as discussed below the official record shows that Washington hoped the TPP would be successful where APEC, the FTAA, and the DDR were left wanting.

At times, Washington’s commitment to free trade was contested by those adversely impacted by, or politically opposed to, the economic restructuring associated with globalization, including within the US.⁵⁹ Dramatic protests during the 1999 ministerial meeting of the WTO, referred to as the ‘Battle in Seattle’, brought together a collection of consumer, labor, and environmental groups and highlighted the influence of the ‘alter-globalization’ movement.⁶⁰ In the 2000s, labor and other civil society organizations lobbied against free trade agreements pursued by the Bush administration. This opposition had, at most, a

⁵⁶ Kevin Gallagher, ‘Understanding Developing Country Resistance to the Doha Round’, *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2008), pp. 62-85.

⁵⁷ Rubrick Biegon, *US Power in Latin America: Renewing Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 62-5.

⁵⁸ Miles Kahler, ‘Rising Powers and Global Governance: Negotiating Change in a Resilient Status Quo’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (2013), pp. 711-29.

⁵⁹ Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization*; Rupert, ‘Globalising Common Sense’; Gill, ‘Organic Crisis, Global Leadership and Progressive Alternatives’.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Pleyers, *Alter-Globalization: Becoming Actors in a Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Pres, 2010).

marginal impact on policymaking. However, the financial and credit crisis of 2007-09 and accompanying recession, global in scope but ‘originating’ in the US, marked a turning point in public attitudes. By 2010, the favorability of free trade agreements in the US was at a 13-year low; concerns over employment, wages, and inequality became more pronounced.⁶¹ Obama, who came to office during the crisis, intimated a more Keynesian, reformist approach, even pledging to renegotiate NAFTA.⁶² Notwithstanding some changes domestically, his administration’s foreign economic policy showed considerable continuity with the previous post-Cold War administrations, built mainly on a commitment to open markets and capitalist globalization and backed by elite power networks and corporate capital.⁶³ The Obama administration’s construction of the TPP must be seen in this light.

A hegemonic project: The TPP and US strategy

If hegemony in the international political economy entails multiple forms of power, which operate simultaneously to reproduce the (pre-existing) advantages of leading actors, hegemonic projects can be understood as political efforts to augment these asymmetrical advantages via one or more of these dimensions of power. This involves an element of agency on the part of the hegemon, as, for instance, leading/dominant states choose how to apply the foreign policy ‘tools’ at their disposal to ‘lock in’ and extend their structurally-advantageous position, including with respect to other states.

⁶¹ Pew Research Center, ‘Americans are of Two Minds on Trade’, 9 November 2010; Pew Research Center, ‘Americans Have Dim View of Trade’s Impact on Jobs and Wages’, 17 September 2014.

⁶² Barack Obama, *Change We Can Believe In: Barack Obama’s Plan to Renew America’s Promise* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008), pp. 99-100.

⁶³ Van Apeldoorn and de Graaff, ‘Corporate Elite Networks and U.S. Post-Cold War Grand Strategy’; Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Naná de Graaff, ‘Obama’s Economic Recovery Strategy Open Markets and Elite Power: Business as Usual?’ *International Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (2017), pp. 356-72.

The George W. Bush administration first committed the US to the TPP in 2008. Following an internal consultation, Obama moved ahead with negotiations. The TPP was closely associated with the administration's broader strategic approach to Asia, known as the 'pivot', later rebranded the 'rebalance', which attempted to give US statecraft a renewed sense of strategic purpose.⁶⁴ The move entailed a refocusing of resources on East Asia and the wider Pacific, increasingly prioritized through strategic realignment. By pivoting, Washington would be better positioned to respond to China's continued rise, ostensibly buoyed by an 'exceptional' trade policy.⁶⁵

Targeting China

There was a clear geopolitical objective to the United States' creation of the TPP, which was intended to undercut China's growing economic influence in the Asia-Pacific. This was the 'realist' face of the accord. As argued by scholars attuned to its geostrategic dimensions, the TPP needs to be understood (at least in part) within the context of US (interstate) interests in Asia.⁶⁶ Analysts identified a 'contest of templates' in the Asia-Pacific, with the US and China competing to construct regimes that improve the terms of trade for their strongest sectors.⁶⁷ China's exclusion from the process was crucial, allowing the US to dictate the focus and parameters of the negotiations. This ensured the finished product could act as a 'constraint' on Beijing's ability to shape the political economy of the Asia-Pacific. Notwithstanding the

⁶⁴ Hillary Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, pp. 56-63; Jianren, 'Power Transition and Paradigm Shift in Diplomacy'; Nori Katagiri, 'A Critical Assessment of the Asia Rebalance', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2019), pp. 35-60.

⁶⁵ Dian, 'The Strategic Value of the Trans-Pacific Partnership'; Yang Jiang, 'China's Pursuit of Free Trade Agreements: Is China Exceptional?' *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2010), pp. 238-61.

⁶⁶ Dian, 'The Strategic Value of the Trans-Pacific Partnership'; Bernard K. Gordon, 'Trading Up in Asia: Why the United States Needs the Trans-Pacific Partnership', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (2012), pp. 17-22; Jianren, 'Power Transition and Paradigm Shift in Diplomacy'; Robert S. Ross, 'The Problem with the Pivot', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 6 (2012), pp. 70-82.

⁶⁷ Peter A. Petri and Michael G. Plummer, 'The Trans-Pacific Partnership and Asia-Pacific Integration: Policy Implications', Peterson Institute for International Economics, June 2012.

resurrection of the TPP as the CPTPP, the US withdrawal did create something of a ‘strategic vacuum’ in the trans-Pacific ‘space’.⁶⁸

As stated by Congressional researchers, ‘the fundamental goal underpinning’ the pivot was to ‘devote more effort to influencing the development of the Asia-Pacific’s norms and rules, particularly as China emerge(d) as an ever-more influential regional power’.⁶⁹ Tom Donilon, Obama’s national security adviser, wrote that the TPP was the ‘centerpiece’ of the ‘economic rebalance’. Its most important aims, he claimed, were strategic: ‘A deal would solidify US leadership in Asia and, together with the negotiations over a free trade pact in Europe, put the United States at the center of a great project: writing the rules that will govern the global economy for the next century’. The TPP would also ‘incentivize the spread of free markets and liberal economic principles’.⁷⁰ The (elite) ‘common sense’ of this appeal was based mainly on the renewed spread of neoliberalism. From a more popular perspective, it was largely disassociated from domestic considerations as the strategy came together, notwithstanding later claims by the Obama administration that the TPP would create jobs.⁷¹ Rather, the ‘folkloric’ aspects of this geostrategic outlook tapped into a traditional understanding of American ‘supremacy’ in the developing world, a longstanding feature of US foreign policy ideology.⁷² Underpinned by the notion that the US should adhere to its internationalist role (with respect to the liberal order, for instance), this commonsensical

⁶⁸ Griffith, Steinberg, and Zysman, ‘From Great Power Politics to a Strategic Vacuum’.

⁶⁹ Mark E. Manyin, Stephen Daggett, Ben Dolven, Susan V. Lawrence, Michael Martin, Ronald O’Rourke, and Bruce Vaughn, ‘Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration’s “Rebalancing” toward Asia’, Congressional Research Service, 28 March 2012, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Tom Donilon, ‘Obama is on the Right Course with the Pivot to Asia’, *Washington Post*, 20 April 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/obama-is-on-the-right-course-with-the-pivot-to-asia/2014/04/20/ed719108-c73c-11e3-9f37-7ce307c56815_story.html?utm_term=.27b6b14f1157.

⁷¹ Robert E. Scott, ‘White House Wrong on Fast Track: Massive Trade Deals Cost Jobs, Depress Wages’, Policy Memorandum, Economic Policy Institute, 5 February 2014, <https://www.epi.org/publication/white-house-wrong-fast-track-massive-trade/>.

⁷² Augelli and Murphy, *America’s Quest for Supremacy and the Third World*.

feature of US foreign policy grew increasingly contested during the period of the TPP negotiations.⁷³

For its part, China's regional trade efforts focused largely on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and affiliated forums and proposals. In 2012, Beijing formally launched the RCEP, seen as a clear alternative to the TPP.⁷⁴ The Chinese template was narrower and more goods-based than the model offered by Washington. The adoption of Beijing's preferred rules, 'even if open to US participation', would be disadvantageous to US interests 'because they exclude provisions important to US commercial trade—disciplines on services, investment, and intellectual property rights, as well as enforceable provisions on labor and the environment'.⁷⁵ China's geoeconomic statecraft was reinforced by additional proposals, including the Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013, which aimed to deepen ties between China and its partners.

There was some ambivalence among planners regarding the possibility of incorporating China.⁷⁶ Washington sent mixed messages in this regard. Obama alluded to the TPP as a way of pushing China to adopt international standards.⁷⁷ However, China's inclusion would require the support of existing TPP members. It would depend on Beijing's willingness to participate in what was a comprehensive, US-led regime. 'With the agreement's focus on

⁷³ Pew Research Center, 'Public Uncertain, Divided over America's Place in the World', April 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2016/05/05-05-2016-Foreign-policy-APW-release.pdf>; Jacob Poushter, 'American Public, Foreign Policy Experts Sharply Disagree over Involvement in Global Economy', Pew Research Center, 28 October 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/28/american-public-foreign-policy-experts-sharply-disagree-over-involvement-in-global-economy/>.

⁷⁴ Evelyn S. Devadason, 'The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP): The Chinese Perspective', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 23, No. 87 (2014), p. 475.

⁷⁵ Ian F. Fergusson, Mark A. McMinimy, and Brock R. Williams, 'The Trans-Pacific Partnership: Negotiations and Issues for Congress', Congressional Research Service, 19 November 2014, p. 11.

⁷⁶ Gordon, 'Trading Up in Asia'; Ross, 'The Problem with the Pivot'.

⁷⁷ The White House, 'Remarks by the President and Governor Romney in the Third Presidential Debate', 23 October 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/10/23/remarks-president-and-governor-romney-third-presidential-debate>.

expansion throughout the region’, noted Congressional researchers, ‘negotiating partners may wish to establish disciplines now on certain aspects of the Chinese and other Asia-Pacific economies’. This explained the push for new disciplines on state-owned enterprises in the text.⁷⁸ In the words of one Singaporean official, ‘China would prefer a system of bilateral or regional agreements in which it could dominate its partners, while the TPP, on the other hand, would pull all of Asia along and would “keep everyone honest”’.⁷⁹

Were Washington to reject the TPP, according to one official, there would be ‘negative consequences for the United States as well as its friends in the region, with China taking on a more dominant role among the Asia Pacific economies’. Washington needed to ‘play a leading role in managing the political process by sending the “right signals” on carve outs and exceptions’ to ensure a comprehensive agreement.⁸⁰ Similar sentiments were expressed by Singaporean officials, with one minister explaining that the TPP was crucial ‘to balance the existing China-led approach’. Without US leadership, ‘China would begin to dominate the region’. The Deputy USTR provided assurance that the US wanted the TPP to ‘take off’ and ‘become something larger that would stretch across the Pacific’.⁸¹ A 2010 cable conveyed Chinese views of the TPP, noting that Beijing was ‘paying close attention to US progress’ on the agreement. While there was no specific mention of China eventually joining, Chinese officials acknowledged ‘US strategic economic leadership in the region’, claiming there was ‘very little daylight’ between Beijing and Washington on ‘principles for (the) development of regional architecture’. Chinese officials predicted that ‘progress on regional

⁷⁸ Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’, p. 10.

⁷⁹ WikiLeaks, ‘Senator Bond in Singapore: Taking the Pulse of the Region and APEC US’, 2010, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10SINGAPORE102_a.html.

⁸⁰ WikiLeaks, ‘Trade Minister on TPP - The Hour Is Not Yet Here’, 2009, <http://wikileaks.ikiru.ch/cable/09WELLINGTON275/>.

⁸¹ WikiLeaks, ‘Singapore Encourages US Involvement in P4, Hopes for P8 Negotiations in 2009’, 2008, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08SINGAPORE961_a.html.

integration would be slow and incremental'.⁸² For their part, US officials viewed China's use of the existing architecture as undermining US influence.⁸³

Garnering the participation of other East Asian countries was crucial to the strategic objectives of the TPP. The original ('P4') agreement was ripe for expansion as Washington moved on from the bilateral focus of the George W. Bush administration (including FTAs with Chile, Colombia, Peru, and South Korea). This shift was communicated to interlocutors, as, for instance, the US encouraged both Malaysia and Vietnam to enter talks.⁸⁴ A similar persuasive process can be seen in the diplomatic record with Japan. At times, the Japanese appeared hesitant to deviate from the existing APEC framework.⁸⁵ Sensitivities in the agricultural sector and a hesitancy to engage in grand economic alliances were highlighted by Japanese authorities as potential pitfalls to the country's endorsement of the TPP.⁸⁶ Japan joined the talks in 2013, ratifying the accord in December 2016, after Trump's election.

In the strategic logic of the 'pivot', in which the TPP was designed to check Beijing's growing influence in the political economy of East Asia, China's membership in APEC was notable. China expressed 'uneasiness' with US plans to use a trade agreement to divide China from other APEC members.⁸⁷ US officials were aware that the TPP would likely undermine existing trade efforts in APEC and/or ASEAN, with one ASEAN official noting the 'lack of

⁸² WikiLeaks, 'PRC: Positive Response to Secretary's Speech on Asia-Pacific Multilateralism', 2010, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10BEIJING168_a.html.

⁸³ WikiLeaks, 'Chinese Views of Asian and Asia-Pacific Regional Architecture', 2008, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BEIJING900_a.html.

⁸⁴ WikiLeaks, 'Scenesetter for Visit to Malaysia by Deputy US Trade Representative Ambassador Marantis', 2010, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10KUALALUMPUR61_a.html; WikiLeaks, 'Scenesetter for CODEL Baucus, Dec 16-20, 2008', 2008, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08HANOI1342_a.html.

⁸⁵ See for example, WikiLeaks, 'APEC Senior Official Kurt Tong's Meetings on APEC, US-Japan Relations and Investment', 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09TOKYO2358_a.html.

⁸⁶ WikiLeaks, 'Japanese Officials Weigh in on the WTO Modalities and Trade Liberalization', 2008, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08TOKYO3381_a.html.

⁸⁷ WikiLeaks, 'Ambassador Michalak Highlights USG APEC and ASEAN Initiatives', 2007, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07SINGAPORE206_a.html.

institutional compatibility between ASEAN, APEC and the Trans-Pacific Partnership'.⁸⁸ As a manifestation of the 'rebalance', the TPP would 'serve to shape the economic architecture of the region', even as it was intended to have implications for the larger global economy. It held 'the potential to harmonize existing agreements with US FTA partners, attract new participants, and establish regional rules on new policy issues facing the global economy—possibly providing impetus to future multilateral liberalization under the WTO'.⁸⁹ It had the added appeal of connecting East Asia to Latin America, thus responding to the impact of China's 'rise' in Washington's 'backyard',⁹⁰ simultaneously serving as a potential means of 'modernizing' NAFTA. Some even speculated on the possibility of merging the TPP with the TTIP.⁹¹

Writing neoliberal rules on trade

Like previous US-backed free trade agreements, the TPP was designed to advance the broad but selective liberalization of participating economies. According to one study comparing the language of the TPP with previous accords,⁹² the contents of the chapters were taken largely from previous US trade agreements; the more controversial provisions, including the investment chapter, drew even more heavily from existing US trade treaties. The consensual power of the TPP was to operate in concert with its function as a targeted, multilateral response to China's ability to influence the development of the region's trade and investment

⁸⁸ WikiLeaks, 'US-ABC Promotes Bilateral Trade and Investment', 2010, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10JAKARTA202_a.html.

⁸⁹ Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, 'The Trans-Pacific Partnership', p. 2.

⁹⁰ Rubrick Biegon, 'The United States and Latin America in the Trans-Pacific Partnership: Renewing Hegemony in a Post-Washington Consensus Hemisphere?' *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2017), pp. 81-98.

⁹¹ Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, 'The Trans-Pacific Partnership', p. 52.

⁹² Todd Allee and Andrew Lugg, 'Who Wrote the Rules for the Trans-Pacific Partnership?' *Research & Politics*, July-September 2016, pp. 1-9.

architecture. In spite of claims by the Obama administration that the TPP represented something ‘new’, it serviced an older neoliberal agenda.⁹³

Predicated on the realization of a multilateral consensus, trade agreements are a means of concretizing common sense ideas on policy and governance. Nevertheless, they foster ‘winners and losers’ through their specific rules and procedures. The TPP provided the best opportunity for the US to construct the kind of regime it hoped to implement in Asia, with or without China. Washington felt it could focus the process on issues of import to its commercial agenda, including, most notably, investment and services.⁹⁴ US officials had earlier concluded that a revamped architecture was needed to advance liberalization.⁹⁵ This was a bipartisan policy consensus that overlapped the Bush and Obama administrations, dovetailing with Obama’s pledge to recommit the US to the ‘growth of multilateral organizations’ in Asia.⁹⁶

From its inception, the capacity of the TPP to broaden over time was extremely important.⁹⁷ Assuming the pact reached critical mass, its existence would “‘put the squeeze” on Japan (which eventually joined), (South) Korea (which did not) and others’, meaning ‘the real payoff (would) come in the long term’.⁹⁸ Though a smaller group of negotiating countries would be easier to manage, the objective was to realize a broad-based regional configuration,

⁹³ Chodor, ‘The Rise and Fall and Rise of the Trans-Pacific Partnership’; Van Apeldoorn and de Graaff, ‘Obama’s Economic Recovery Strategy’.

⁹⁴ Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’; Public Citizen, ‘Initial Analyses of Key TPP Chapters’, 2015, <https://www.citizen.org/sites/default/files/analysis-tpp-text-november-2015.pdf>.

⁹⁵ WikiLeaks, ‘Brunei Sees P4 Free Trade Agreement as Possible War Forward on FTAAP’, 2007, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BANDARSERIBEGAWAN165_a.html.

⁹⁶ The White House, ‘Remarks by President Barack Obama at Suntory Hall (Japan)’, 14 November 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-suntory-hall>.

⁹⁷ Meredith Kolsky Lewis, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership: New Paradigm or Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing?’ *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2011), p. 29; WikiLeaks, ‘US-Vietnam Policy Planning Talks’, 2008, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08HANOI1243_a.html.

⁹⁸ WikiLeaks, ‘DAS Reed Engages on TPP, UN Reform, Environmental Cooperation, Fiji, APEC, and Bilateral Issues with New Zealand’, 2010, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10WELLINGTON65_a.html.

encompassing most if not all of the major economies of the Asia-Pacific, and beyond. Latin America was significant here. Colombia, Costa Rica, and Panama were mentioned as potential future members.⁹⁹ As negotiations advanced, officials were directed to ‘continue talks with other trans-Pacific partners that have expressed interest in joining the TPP in order to facilitate their future participation’.¹⁰⁰

The TPP was envisioned to ‘enable the updating of the agreement as appropriate to address trade issues that emerge in the future as well as new issues that arise with the expansion of the agreement to include new countries’.¹⁰¹ It aimed to address new areas of commerce and investment not covered under existing rules. There was a general consensus that, to be a ‘landmark’ agreement, it needed to have ‘WTO-plus’ features. The TPP was not only wider in scope and coverage than the WTO framework, but in some respects was ‘more ambitious than several bilateral FTAs signed by the United States, including with some of the TPP members’.¹⁰²

From the perspective of US policymakers, the utility of the TPP rested in part on its potential to supplant and/or assimilate pre-existing agreements among members (on market access, for example). The requisite architecture was hotly debated. The US argued that existing FTA market-access schedules should be maintained. ‘Defensively, US bilateral agreements often provide carve outs, phased tariff reductions, and product-specific ROOs (rules of origin) that the United States does not want to open for negotiation. Offensively, these agreements also contain WTO-plus provisions (namely, IP [intellectual property] and services) that the United

⁹⁹ Biegon, ‘The United States and Latin America in the Trans-Pacific Partnership’, pp. 91-2.

¹⁰⁰ The White House, ‘Trans-Pacific Partnership Leaders Statement’, 12 November 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/12/trans-pacific-partnership-leaders-statement>.

¹⁰¹ The United States Trade Representative (USTR), ‘Outlines of the TPP’, 12 November 2011, <http://www.ustr.gov/tpp/outlines-of-TPP>.

¹⁰² Amitendu Palit, *The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), China and India: Economic and Political Implications* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 24.

States want(ed) to preserve and not have whittled away in TPP negotiations’. In this scenario, Washington ‘would have to negotiate new market-access schedules only with TPP partners without US FTAs: New Zealand, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam’.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, other participating countries maintained that a common market-access schedule would better address the ‘noodle bowl’ effect of overlapping obligations and conflicting timescales. Although Washington hoped for an efficient, comprehensively ‘open’ regime, since NAFTA the US ‘has always pressed for strict (that is, more protectionist) ROOs for its “sensitive” products: textiles, apparel, and dairy products’.¹⁰⁴

Washington’s leadership was indispensable in assembling the coalition and writing the rules that constituted the final agreement.¹⁰⁵ The accord represented a boon to US power because its rules served US interests even as they restricted its agency in some areas (e.g. by stripping ‘buy American’ and/or ‘buy local’ provisions from government procurement policies). Washington could play the role of architect because of its structural power in the global economy, opening the process to key factions of US capital, which lobbied on behalf of the agreement via organizations like the US Chamber of Commerce, the Emergency Committee for American Trade, the US Council for International Business, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Coalition of Service Industries, and the US Business Coalition for TPP.¹⁰⁶ This included, most prominently, the financial services sector (namely banking, insurance, and legal services), a leading priority for US negotiators, as well as digital, data-based, and e-

¹⁰³ Claude Barfield, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership: A Model for Twenty-First Century Trade Agreements’, American Enterprise Institute, International Economic Outlook No. 2, 2011, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁰⁵ Allee and Lugg, ‘Who Wrote the Rules for the Trans-Pacific Partnership?’

¹⁰⁶ US Chamber of Commerce, ‘Trans-Pacific Partnership’, 7 February 2014, <https://www.uschamber.com/issue-brief/trans-pacific-partnership>; Ravenhill, ‘The Political Economy of the Trans-Pacific Partnership’, p. 578.

commerce firms and companies providing concomitant delivery services.¹⁰⁷ Silicon Valley firms and interest groups had an outsized impact on the agreement, which demonstrated their growing political clout and the increased responsiveness of officials to demands to integrate the ‘digital trade agenda’ into the model for a ‘high-quality, twenty-first century agreement’.¹⁰⁸ It also included the pharmaceutical industry, which pushed for rules on patent protections and—along with digital media interests—advocated new provisions on intellectual property rights.¹⁰⁹ Agricultural capital was more divided, as were small and medium enterprises.¹¹⁰

Confidential emails obtained via Freedom of Information Act requests shed light on the ability of major multinational corporations to influence TPP rules through direct communications with negotiators. This included Abbott, Cisco Systems, Corning, DuPont, General Electric, Intel, Medtronic, Microsoft, and Qualcomm, among others. These were complemented by communications from representatives from an array of industry and consulting groups and law firms, such as the Advanced Medical Technology Association (AdvaMed), the American Chemistry Council, CropLife, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), the Motion Picture Association of America, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), and Wiley Rein LLP.¹¹¹ This took place outside of the formal stakeholder process

¹⁰⁷ Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’, p. 17; Lim, Elms, and Low, eds., *The Trans-Pacific Partnership*.

¹⁰⁸ Shamel Azmeh and Christopher Foster, ‘The TPP and the Digital Trade Agenda: Digital Industrial Policy and Silicon Valley’s Influence on New Trade Agreements’, London School of Economics and Political Science, International Develop Working Paper Series, No. 16-175, January 2016; Lim, Elms, and Low, eds., *The Trans-Pacific Partnership*.

¹⁰⁹ Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’, pp. 34-5.

¹¹⁰ Barfield, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’, p. 4; Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’, pp. 24-30; Ravenhill, ‘The Political Economy of the Trans-Pacific Partnership’, pp. 578-9.

¹¹¹ William New, ‘Confidential USTR Emails Show Close Industry Involvement in TPP Negotiations’, Intellectual Property Watch, 5 June 2015, <https://www.ip-watch.org/2015/06/05/confidential-ustr-emails-show-close-industry-involvement-in-tpp-negotiations/>.

which ran parallel to earlier rounds of talks, and which allowed businesses (and select civil society groups) to make inputs into the multilateral negotiations.

Building momentum for further liberalization

Global capitalism is contingent on the actions of states, which create the pathways for capital to become increasingly transnational.¹¹² New liberalization regimes are necessary for the (ever-)greater exchange of goods and services—for capital accumulation on a global scale. In the trade literature, the common (sense) metaphor is that of a bicycle—liberalization must keep moving to stay upright and function.¹¹³ Novel agreements must address new areas of commerce; additional markets must be ‘opened up’, barriers to commerce ‘torn down’. ‘Free trade’ works by ‘integrating peripheral spaces into the global political economy in order to ensure the continued accumulation of surplus value in core spaces of advanced capitalism through unequal exchange’.¹¹⁴ Like previous FTAs, the TPP was driven to facilitate capital accumulation and mobility. It sought to keep the trade bicycle upright through a focus on disciplinary areas of interest to dynamic factions of transnational capital.

As the WTO’s DDR degenerated, US policy was ‘to pursue all available multilateral, regional, and bilateral opportunities to lower trade barriers and promote international commerce’.¹¹⁵ This was the cornerstone of the Bush administration’s doctrine of competitive liberalization, which updated longstanding objectives of US trade policy for the post-Doha

¹¹² Panitch and Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism*; Bastiaan van Apeldoorn, Naná de Graaff, and Henk Overbeek, ‘The Reconfiguration of the Global State–Capital Nexus’, *Globalizations*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2012), pp. 471-86.

¹¹³ Rorden Wilkinson, ‘Language, Power and Multilateral Trade Negotiations’, *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2009), pp. 604-5.

¹¹⁴ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘Uneven and Combined Development and Unequal Exchange: The Second Wind of Neoliberal “Free Trade”?’ *Globalizations*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2014), p. 42.

¹¹⁵ WikiLeaks, ‘AUSTR Eissenstat Visit to Argentina’, 2006, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BUENOSAIRES2292_a.html.

environment. Competitive liberalization had three immediate purposes: opening up national economies to US goods and capital; fostering the adoption of laws and regulations to accommodate US-based businesses; and building support around wider (non-trade related) US foreign policies and values.¹¹⁶ Moreover, by starting with less-ambitious agreements, it was thought bilateral FTAs could ‘spark’ interest in the WTO process.¹¹⁷ Failing that, they would serve to lock in market-based reforms across various sectors. The TPP originated within Bush’s competitive liberalization framework, but dovetailed neatly with Obama’s strategic ‘pivot’. It was also intended to have a knock-on effect irrespective of the future of the DDR. Institutionally, it was designed to attract additional countries over time, generating further momentum for liberalization. The discourse is laden with references to the TPP as a ‘catalyst’,¹¹⁸ ‘tipping point’,¹¹⁹ and ‘game changer’.¹²⁰

As stated by a Singaporean minister in relation to the TPP talks, the US had ‘a special role and responsibility as the anchor of the world economy to lead a global movement for free trade and investment’. As Washington viewed the agreement as a means of advancing new WTO-plus rules, US partners viewed ‘the TPP as a way to solidly “lock” the United States into the region’,¹²¹ a goal that came to the fore with China’s continued growth during and after the tumult of the global financial crisis. Like previous FTAs, the TPP was geared toward ‘opening up’ participating economies beyond the simple reduction of tariffs and quotas on the

¹¹⁶ Evenett and Meier, ‘An Interim Assessment of the US Trade Policy of “Competitive Liberalization”’.

¹¹⁷ Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’, p. 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹¹⁹ David Pilling and Shawn Donnan, ‘Trans-Pacific Partnership: Ocean’s Twelve’, *Financial Times*, 22 September 2013, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8c253c5c-2056-11e3-b8c6-00144feab7de.html#axzz3BWxc5Is3>.

¹²⁰ Mireya Solís and Justin Vaïsse, ‘Free Trade Game Changer’, Brookings Institution, 17 January 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/01/free-trade-game-changer>.

¹²¹ WikiLeaks, ‘EAP/ANP Deputy Director Gets Read-out on New Zealand Defense, Trade, Economy’, 2010, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10WELLINGTON57_a.html.

exchange of finished goods.¹²² Again, proponents of the agreement viewed it as a ‘catalyst’ for the implementation of ‘key internal reforms’ amongst those members who, like Vietnam, for example, remained relatively closed to the penetration of global capital.¹²³ Washington urged the country to join the TPP not only to promote specific interests of US industry (beef exporters; intellectual property in biotechnology), but to keep Vietnam on the path of ‘economic reform’.¹²⁴

From the outset, Washington’s interest in the TPP was concentrated in the areas of investment and financial services. A 2008 cable noted that ‘the US had done detailed analysis of the existing TPP covering issues like rules of origin, IP, and market access and told the P4 that if the US was to join in, work to upgrade parts of the P4 agreement would be needed; the P4 agreed’.¹²⁵ As with previous FTAs, the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism was integral to the US position, though highly contentious. It aimed to protect MNCs against host government actions, allowing foreign investors to bring claims against participating governments to a panel set up by the agreement. The ISDS mechanism helped generate considerable political opposition to the broader deal,¹²⁶ countering the ‘momentum’ to be generated by the accord. That the USTR pushed back against opposition to the ISDS shows the importance Washington accorded these rules, which it claimed would be

¹²² Chodor, ‘The Rise and Fall and Rise of the Trans-Pacific Partnership’; Congressional Research Service, ‘International Trade and Finance’, p. 11; Van Apeldoorn and de Graaff, ‘Obama’s Economic Recovery Strategy’, p. 368.

¹²³ WikiLeaks, ‘EAP/ANP Deputy Director Gets Read-out on New Zealand Defense, Trade, Economy’.

¹²⁴ WikiLeaks, ‘Ambassador’s Message to Undersecretary Hormats on our Economic Agenda with Vietnam’, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09HANOI1116_a.html.

¹²⁵ WikiLeaks, ‘DAUSTR Bell’s Australia Meetings: TPP, WTO, and FTAs’, 2008, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08CANBERRA1111_a.html.

¹²⁶ Public Citizen, ‘Initial Analyses of Key TPP Chapters’.

‘stronger... than the provisions in many other investment agreements in which the United States is not a participant’.¹²⁷

The finalized (but not ratified) TPP encompassed 30 chapters covering a wide range of investment and regulatory issues and disciplines. The text reflected Washington’s initial priorities: ‘cross-cutting issues’ such as ‘supply-chain management, competitiveness, transparency, regulatory coherence, labor and the environment, development, and small and medium businesses’, with corresponding rules aimed at ‘behind-the-border regulatory barriers’.¹²⁸ In the elite common sense of US trade policy, the TPP was needed because of the ‘proliferation of regulatory and non-tariff barriers, which (had) become a major hurdle for businesses gaining access to foreign markets’.¹²⁹ Among other provisions, the text restricted capital controls. It included rules on state-owned enterprises, generally excluded from previous FTAs, to regulate the subsidies, low-cost credit, and preferential access to government procurement enjoyed by these firms. Critics maintained that, despite the prominence of ‘toxic derivatives’ in the financial crisis, ‘the TPP would impose obligations on TPP countries to allow new financial products and services to enter their economies if permitted in other TPP countries’.¹³⁰

The powerful US Chamber of Commerce played an active role in lobbying on behalf of the TPP, making the ratification and implementation of the agreement one of its top priorities. The Chamber’s messaging showed the degree to which the agreement was understood to benefit US companies while simultaneously shoring-up global capitalism. ‘As nations across

¹²⁷ The United States Trade Representative (USTR), ‘The Facts on Investor-State Dispute Settlement’, March 2014, <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/blog/2014/March/Facts-Investor-State%20Dispute-Settlement-Safeguarding-Public-Interest-Protecting-Investors>.

¹²⁸ Barfield, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’, p. 2.

¹²⁹ Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’, p. 41.

¹³⁰ Public Citizen, ‘Initial Analyses of Key TPP Chapters’, p. 6.

the Pacific clinch their own trade agreements that exclude the United States’, the Chamber wrote, ‘the TPP represents a vital opportunity to ensure that American exporters have access to the world’s most dynamic economies’. At the same time, ‘the TPP negotiations represent an opportunity to establish strong rules to protect intellectual property, cultivate the digital economy, and combat trade and investment protectionism’.¹³¹

Planners argued that the TPP would ‘go beyond the level of protection provided in the WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) Agreement’ to include the application of these protections to digital media.¹³² The final agreement included more stringent enforcement mechanisms to protect copyrights and punish trademark counterfeiting, including online, with potentially significant ramifications for internet governance.

Additionally, the US pushed for enhanced protections for pharmaceutical patents. There were concerns among critics that this would have curbed developing countries’ access to generic medicines, with devastating results for public health.¹³³ It was these and other features of the TPP, including the ISDS mechanism, which stimulated public opposition from a variety of ‘populist’ groups/currents in the US (and elsewhere). This problematized the agreement from a popular common sense perspective, undercutting the elite consensus in favor of the pact.

A fracturing consensus on free trade

A cornerstone of US hegemony for decades, free trade was closely linked to neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatization, and financialization through the Washington Consensus. Prior to the global financial turmoil wrought by the US housing crash and credit

¹³¹ US Chamber of Commerce, ‘Trans-Pacific Partnership’.

¹³² Fergusson, McMinimy, and Williams, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’, p. 29.

¹³³ Public Citizen, ‘Initial Analyses of Key TPP Chapters’.

crunch of 2008, Washington's free traders scored a number of victories, despite the breakdown of the WTO's Doha round. The George W. Bush administration signed a series of bilateral FTAs and secured a multilateral agreement with countries in Central America (the Central American Free Trade Agreement-Dominican Republic [CAFTA-DR]). However, a much larger regional agreement, the Free Trade Area of the Americas, collapsed amidst political opposition in the mid-2000s.¹³⁴ The 2008 financial crisis further undercut support for 'free market' policies. In the context of the most severe economic contraction in decades, as US economic policy turned inward toward financial bailouts and fiscal stimulus, free trade advocates lamented the collapse of the bipartisan consensus on liberalization.¹³⁵

As a variant of historical materialism,¹³⁶ neo-Gramscian IR/IPE would seem well-suited to connecting the crisis moment produced by the unravelling of the Washington Consensus to the internal contradictions of global capitalism. Importantly, however, this disintegration was an extended, indirect process mediated through gradual shifts in mass public opinion, as evidenced by the changing polling around trade issues,¹³⁷ and as recorded in the views of diplomats and officials. In light of the Great Recession, increasing trade deficits, and the persistent loss of manufacturing jobs, the common sense on free trade grew gradually more contested. Policymakers saw a 'new atmosphere' on economic policy.¹³⁸ Even before the nadir of the crisis in 2008, the USTR had identified an 'unsettled political climate' emerging

¹³⁴ Biegon, *US Power in Latin America*, pp. 70-4.

¹³⁵ Cato Institute, *Cato Handbook for Policymakers*, 7th ed. (Washington: Cato Institute, 2009), pp. 611-23; Daniel Ikenson and Scott Lincicome, 'Audaciously Hopeful: How President Obama Can Help Restore the Pro-Trade Consensus', Cato Institute, April 2009.

¹³⁶ Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis*.

¹³⁷ Frank Newport, 'Americans Split on Idea of Withdrawing From Trade Treaties', Gallup, 28 April 2016, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/191135/americans-split-idea-withdrawing-trade-treaties.aspx>; Pew, 'Americans Are of Two Minds on Trade'; Pew, 'Americans Have Dim View of Trade's Impact'; Pew, 'Public Uncertain, Divided over America's Place in the World'.

¹³⁸ WikiLeaks, 'Vietnamese Officials Positive about Trade Ties despite Challenges', 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09HANOI703_a.html.

on trade issues.¹³⁹ American officials explained to interlocutors that ‘it was not an easy time to promote new trade agreements in the United States given record high unemployment; USG officials had to explain how (the TPP) would translate into new jobs’. Unsurprisingly, ‘several Ambassadors (from among the TPP countries) observed that officials needed to make the same case for the TPP in their own capitals’.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, ‘participants (saw) the US as the major driver of the TPP’. They expected Washington ‘to play a leading role’ in expanding the accord while working to dampen down protectionist rhetoric.¹⁴¹ Washington’s ability to see this through would be constrained by growing domestic opposition to the TPP.

The TPP was the subject of an extensive campaign by unions and civil society groups in the US and elsewhere to steer the negotiation process toward a more progressive set of rules on labor rights, climate change and conservation, human rights, and health and consumer safety issues, pursued through the TPP’s formal consultation process with civil society stakeholders.¹⁴² When this effort failed, these groups focused on blocking the ratification of the TPP. This included established left-leaning NGOs like the Citizens Trade Campaign, a coalition of over 340 local and state groups that constitutes ‘a leading advocacy vehicle to fight for trade policy that serves the interests of a majority of the world’s people, instead of the self-serving agenda of multinational corporations’, and Public Citizen, a consumer advocacy group with over 500,000 members, which helped coordinate the extensive grassroots campaign against the TPP, making it the first trade agreement to fail to obtain a

¹³⁹ WikiLeaks, ‘New Zealand’s Minister of Trade, Phil Goff Explores Possibility of Regional Free Trade Area with Visiting US Delegation in NZ for TIFA Talks’, 2007, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07WELLINGTON509_a.html.

¹⁴⁰ WikiLeaks, ‘TPP Country Representatives Looking to Melbourne for Answers’, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09HANOI1406_a.html.

¹⁴¹ WikiLeaks, ‘Staff Del Luse Hears MFA’s View of Asian Challenges’, 2008; https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08SINGAPORE1337_a.html; WikiLeaks, ‘Singapore Trade Minister Pushes for Robust US Trade Agenda’, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SINGAPORE295_a.html.

¹⁴² Chodor, ‘The Rise and Fall and Rise of the Trans-Pacific Partnership’; Gordon, ‘Trading Up in Asia’.

majority in the US Congress.¹⁴³ Concerts were held under the banner ‘Rock Against the TPP’, sponsored by over 40 unions and civil society groups.¹⁴⁴ Activism encompassed digital rights and ‘open Internet’ advocates opposed to provisions in the TPP on data privacy and copyright protections for digital content.¹⁴⁵ Environmental NGOs like Sierra Club called for a rejection of the accord for failing to address climate change.¹⁴⁶ The AFL-CIO, the United States’ largest union, helped spearhead the movement against the TPP, which its president viewed as part of ‘a failed, corporate-driven ideology’.¹⁴⁷

The TPP was also opposed by grassroots forces on the right of the American political spectrum. The majority of Republican lawmakers backed the TPP, as did most prominent conservative think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute.¹⁴⁸ However, the accord caused something of a split within the nominally ‘free market’ Tea Party movement. In 2015, the presidents of a number of Tea Party-affiliated organizations wrote a joint letter to Congress opposing Obama’s trade agenda, framed largely as an executive ‘power grab’ that would damage US manufacturing, while other prominent conservative lobby groups, such as the Club for Growth, continued to back the accord.¹⁴⁹ Breitbart, an online outlet of the so-called ‘alt-right’, reported in 2015 that ‘fast track’

¹⁴³ Citizens Trade Campaign, About CTC, 2019, <https://www.citizenstrade.org/ctc/about-ctc/>; Public Citizen, ‘How People Power Beat the Trans-Pacific Partnership in Congress’, 2019, <https://www.citizen.org/topic/globalization-trade/trans-pacific-partnership-tpp/?search=#work>,

¹⁴⁴ Rock Against the TPP! 2019 [2016], <https://www.rockagainstthetpp.org/#learn-more>.

¹⁴⁵ Electronic Frontier Foundation, ‘TPP: A Post-Mortem’, 15 November 2016, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2016/11/tpp-post-mortem>.

¹⁴⁶ Sierra Club, ‘A Dirty Deal: How the Trans-Pacific Partnership Threatens Our Climate’, December 2015, https://content.sierraclub.org/creative-archive/sites/content.sierraclub.org/creative-archive/files/pdfs/1197%20Dirty%20Deals%20Report%20Web_03_low.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ Richard Trumka, ‘AFL-CIO: TPP Failed Workers and Deserved to Die’, *USA Today*, 6 May 2018, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/05/06/afl-cio-tpp-failed-workers-deserved-die-editorials-debates/34631615/>.

¹⁴⁸ See for example, Barfield, ‘The Trans-Pacific Partnership’; Daniella Markheim, ‘America Should Follow Through with the Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Negotiations’, WebMemo No. 2719, The Heritage Foundation, 4 December 2009, <https://www.heritage.org/trade/report/america-should-follow-through-trans-pacific-partnership-trade-negotiations>.

¹⁴⁹ Adam Behsudi, ‘Liberals, Tea Partiers Mobilize against Obama’s Trade Push’, *Politico*, 20 January 2015, <https://www.politico.com/story/2015/01/obama-trade-push-criticism-114346>.

legislation to authorize the TPP faced ‘conservative headwinds’, with opposition emerging from various factions despite Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s support.¹⁵⁰ More conspiratorial strands of far-right activism fuelled the criticism. One commentator associated with the John Birch Society argued that ‘the sovereignty-destroying TPP regime’ had generated pushback against the ‘plot’ from ‘across the political spectrum’, and that, ‘with enough public pressure, the establishment’s “Obamatrade” agenda to undermine America (would) be stopped in its tracks’.¹⁵¹

Under intense pressure from a diverse range of political actors, the Trans-Pacific Partnership became a major issue in the 2016 US presidential election. Scrutiny of the accord further eroded public support, damaging its prospects politically.¹⁵² The campaigns against the TPP were part of a broad-based and ideologically eclectic ‘backlash’ against globalization on the part of subordinate groups/classes, widening the disjuncture between elite and non-elite views, and creating the conditions for a ‘revolt’ against trade agreements. Running parallel to debates within elite sectors on the desirability of the TPP, ‘everyday’ sectors had grown more hostile to free trade,¹⁵³ providing the assorted anti-TPP forces with a sympathetic audience and with activist support, helping to translate anti-globalization sentiment into a salient electoral issue.

Trump, the TPP, and the 2016 US presidential campaign

¹⁵⁰ Michael Patrick Leahy, ‘Fast Track Trade Bill Faces Conservative Headwinds’, *Breitbart*, 13 January 2015, <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2015/01/13/fast-track-trade-bill-faces-conservative-headwinds/>.

¹⁵¹ Alex Newman, ‘With TPP Signed, Opposition Explodes across Political Spectrum’, *The New American*, 4 February 2016, <https://www.thenewamerican.com/economy/markets/item/22473-with-tpp-signed-opposition-explodes-across-political-spectrum>.

¹⁵² Congressional Research Service, ‘International Trade and Finance’.

¹⁵³ Pew, ‘Public Uncertain, Divided over America’s Place in the World’, pp. 19-22.

Notwithstanding the relative enthusiasm for globalization in the 1990s and early-2000s, the US public was always divided on matters of trade and foreign economic policy. Existing divisions grew more pronounced in the wake of the Great Recession.¹⁵⁴ This was channelled through the agency of actors and movements across the political spectrum. As stated by the Congressional Research Service, ‘during the 2016 presidential campaign, US trade policy and trade agreements received significant attention, particularly regarding the impact of trade agreements on the US economy and workers’.¹⁵⁵ This encompassed not only the TPP but also TTIP, NAFTA, and the WTO, as well as relations with China. The 2016 election crystallized the burgeoning ‘populist’ opposition to free trade coming from various quarters. The issue was particularly important to citizens in the post-industrial ‘swing states’. As summarized by Gallup:

Trade policies... may be highly important to highly specific segments of the population. As such, candidates’ positions on trade could affect the presidential election outcome in certain states or areas within states... Americans living in areas disproportionately affected by trade competition are more likely than others to either vote more strongly left or more strongly right, suggesting that trade policies can, in fact, affect political behavior. Candidates also may find it useful to bring up trade as a campaign issue because it gives them a specific ‘enemy’ to blame for economic woes and provides an easy explanation for the loss of manufacturing jobs.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Pew, ‘Americans are of Two Minds on Trade’; Pew, ‘Americans Have Dim View of Trade’s Impact’; Poushter, ‘American Public, Foreign Policy Experts Sharply Disagree over Involvement in Global Economy’.

¹⁵⁵ Congressional Research Service, ‘International Trade and Finance’, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ Newport, ‘Americans Split on Idea of Withdrawing From Trade Treaties’.

A headline in the *New York Times* noted that ‘anger about trade’, which had been ‘simmering for decades’, ‘boil(ed) over in the ’16 election’.¹⁵⁷ There was a cross-ideological aspect to this ‘populist’ upsurge. An element of the Occupy Wall Street and Tea Party movements,¹⁵⁸ this ‘insurgent’ disposition was represented in the campaigns of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. Not only did opposition to trade liberalization fuel the rise of these ‘outsiders’, it also pushed their principal rivals in both parties to ‘toughen their own trade rhetoric’.¹⁵⁹ Thus, although Hillary Clinton had championed the TPP as part of Obama’s pivot to Asia, a strategy she helped to craft, she was compelled to come out against the TPP during the 2016 campaign.

There is a sharp divide between the US political establishment and the wider public on trade and economic globalization. A 2013 survey of members of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) showed that foreign policy experts have a ‘decidedly internationalist outlook’ and ‘see benefits for the United States from possible effects of increased globalization, including more US companies moving their operations overseas’. On the whole, however, Americans appeared ‘skeptical that the advantages of economic globalization outweigh the disadvantages’.¹⁶⁰ In a 2016 survey, 44 percent of respondents felt global economic engagement was good because it opened markets and created opportunities for growth, while 49 percent felt US involvement in the global economy was bad because it lowered wages and cost jobs.¹⁶¹ Americans with higher levels of education (often used a proxy for class) were more likely to favor globalization. Beyond the issue of trade itself, polling showed uncertainties about ‘America’s place in the world’. Scepticism toward US global economic

¹⁵⁷ Binyamin Appelbaum, ‘Simmering for Decades, Anger about Trade Boils Over in ’16 Election’, *New York Times*, 29 March 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/30/business/economy/trade-donald-trump-bernie-sanders.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Crehan, *Gramsci's Common Sense*.

¹⁵⁹ Appelbaum, ‘Simmering for Decades, Anger about Trade Boils Over’.

¹⁶⁰ Poushter, ‘American Public, Foreign Policy Experts Sharply Disagree over Involvement in Global Economy’.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

ties was higher among Trump supporters than his Republican rivals (with nearly two-thirds of Trump primary voters saying US involvement in the global economy was a ‘bad thing’). On the Democratic side, Sanders voters were more likely than Clinton voters to see globalization in a negative light. The data indicated that Americans were more likely to perceive the US as ‘declining’ power than in previous elections.¹⁶²

That issues of economic globalization were becoming more salient was dramatized by the bombastic rhetoric of the Trump campaign. In Trump’s populist framing, the elites of the US establishment ‘swamp’ were committed to ‘globalism’.¹⁶³ His personalized ‘movement’ incorporated strands of neo-isolationism found in the Tea Party, which had reoriented conservative politics during the Obama presidency.¹⁶⁴ Trump capitalized on a burgeoning anti-elite ‘common sense’ to achieve a full-on ‘Jacksonian revolt’, according to the popular historian Walter Russell Mead, in reference to Andrew Jackson, the archetypical nationalist president: ‘For the first time in 70 years, the American people have elected a president who disparages the policies, ideas, and institutions at the heart of postwar US foreign policy’.¹⁶⁵ The decades-old bipartisan commitment to multilateral free trade was replaced by ‘economic nationalism’. Trump’s ‘America first’ agenda was perhaps strongest in the area of trade.¹⁶⁶ His USTR pledged a ‘fundamental change’ in approach, with more focus on ‘better’ bilateral deals, enforcement, rectifying unfair practices, defending national sovereignty, and using increased leverage to open markets for US goods and services.¹⁶⁷ Trump’s first few years in office witnessed the renegotiation of NAFTA and a prominent ‘trade war’ with China. In

¹⁶² Pew, ‘Public Uncertain, Divided over America’s Place in the World’.

¹⁶³ Rubrick Biegon, ‘A Populist Grand Strategy? Trump and the Framing of American Decline’, *International Relations*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2019), pp. 517-39.

¹⁶⁴ Crehan, *Gramsci’s Common Sense*, pp. 118-45.

¹⁶⁵ Walter Russell Mead, ‘The Jacksonian Revolt’, *Foreign Affairs*, 96, No. 2 (2017), p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ Stokes, ‘Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order’, p. 137.

¹⁶⁷ United States Trade Representative (USTR), ‘2017 Trade Policy Agenda and 2016 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program’, 2017.

2018, Trump threatened to withdraw from the WTO. He ramped up his attacks against the multilateral body in 2019, arguing that it allowed China to take advantage of its status as a developing country ‘to avail itself of flexibilities under any new WTO rules’.¹⁶⁸

Trump’s idiosyncrasies are certainly part of this story. His personal antipathy toward Obama has likely contributed to his foreign policy, as illustrated by the decisions to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Iran nuclear agreement.¹⁶⁹ The notion of finalizing ‘Obama’s deal’ on the TPP was thus a nonstarter for Trump. Nevertheless, on the matter of trade protectionism Trump appears to be a ‘true believer’.¹⁷⁰ His fixation on trade deficits has reshaped the executive’s approach to policy.¹⁷¹ His effort to re-center US trade policy on the bilateral track stems not only from his hostility toward liberal internationalism, but also, it would seem, from a crude if not entirely inaccurate understanding of structural power, in which the size of the US economy provides it with enhanced leverage in bilateral negotiations.¹⁷² Much has been made of Trump’s transactional approach to international relations,¹⁷³ which has yielded uneven and fragmentary results. Indeed, the administration as a whole has been unable to construct a coherent foreign economic policy,¹⁷⁴ in part because of the contradictory forces that cleared Trump’s path to national prominence.

¹⁶⁸ The White House, ‘Memorandum on Reforming Developing-Country Status in the World Trade Organization’, 26 July 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/memorandum-reforming-developing-country-status-world-trade-organization/>.

¹⁶⁹ David Smith, ‘The Anti-Obama: Trump’s Drive to Destroy his Predecessor’s Legacy’, *The Guardian*, 11 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/may/11/donald-trump-barack-obama-legacy>.

¹⁷⁰ Biegon, ‘A Populist Grand Strategy?’; Jon Herbert, Trevor McCrisken, and Andrew Wroe, *The Ordinary Presidency of Donald J. Trump* (New York: Palgrave, 2019), pp. 18, 25-37.

¹⁷¹ James K. Jackson, ‘Trade Deficits and US Trade Policy’, Congressional Research Service, 28 June 2018.

¹⁷² Stokes, ‘Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order’.

¹⁷³ See for example, Ikenberry, ‘The Plot against American Foreign Policy’, p. 4; Stokes, ‘Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order’, pp. 135-8.

¹⁷⁴ Frederick W. Mayer and Nicola Phillips, ‘Global Inequality and the Trump Administration’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2019), pp. 502-10.

The idiosyncrasies associated with Trump's rise can be overstated. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris argue that declining real income and job security over a 35-year-period had primed the US electorate for a protectionist, xenophobic turn. 'The groundswell of support for populists ultimately reflects economic insecurity,' they write, even if 'its immediate cause is a backlash against rapid cultural change'.¹⁷⁵ In 2016, Trump rated better with voters on issues of the economy and jobs, despite Clinton being favored on most other issues.¹⁷⁶ During the campaign the Republican Party held a substantial lead over the Democratic Party when it came to dealing with trade agreements with other countries.¹⁷⁷ Trump's framing of the TPP and NAFTA played off of populist common sense perceptions that they were 'bad deals' and that the US had 'lost' the negotiations.¹⁷⁸ He campaigned against the TPP from the outset, fuelling nascent opposition to it from the populist right-wing, often using provocative and highly emotive language to denigrate the agreement. Linking it to Clinton and calling it a 'disaster' and the 'rape of (the) country', Trump maintained it was 'done by wealthy people that want to take advantage of us'.¹⁷⁹

Trump's populist mercantilism must be understood alongside broad anti-globalization sensibilities that had (re-)emerged in the 'folkloric' common sense of the American working-class. His right-wing discourse co-opted (some of) the concerns of the (mainly progressive) anti-TPP movement. In withdrawing from the TPP, the White House released a statement:

It is the policy of my Administration to represent the American people and their financial well-being in all negotiations (sic), particularly the American worker, and to

¹⁷⁵ Inglehart and Norris, 'Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties', p. 452.

¹⁷⁶ Zac Auter, 'Voters Prefer Trump on Economy, Clinton on Most Other Issues', Gallup, 26 September 2016, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/195809/voters-prefer-trump-economy-clinton-issues.aspx>.

¹⁷⁷ Pew, 'Public Uncertain, Divided over America's Place in the World', p. 56.

¹⁷⁸ Biegon, 'A Populist Grand Strategy?'

¹⁷⁹ Cristiano Lima, 'Trump Calls Trade Deal "a Rape of our Country"', *Politico*, 28 June 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/06/donald-trump-trans-pacific-partnership-224916>.

create fair and economically beneficial trade deals that serve their interests.

Additionally, in order to ensure these outcomes, it is the intention of my

Administration to deal directly with individual countries on a one-on-one (or bilateral)

basis in negotiating future trade deals.¹⁸⁰

This commonsensical appeal to workers was embedded in an explicitly nationalist ideology that challenged the liberal and internationalist (or ‘globalist’) basis of elite commitments to projects like the TPP. In announcing new enforcements of ‘Buy American’ provisions and new protections for US steel producers in April 2017, Trump stated: ‘For decades, America has lost our jobs and our factories to unfair foreign trade. And one steel mill after another has been shut down, abandoned, and closed, and we’re going to reverse that. Other countries have made a living taking advantage of the United States in so many ways, as you know, and I’ve been talking about that for a long time’. Trump’s executive orders, the administration claimed, would ‘stop foreign countries from stealing contracts from American companies and, essentially, from American workers’.¹⁸¹ His trade policy would help to define his nationalism, highlighting a ‘tendency toward unilateralism in furtherance of specific interests’ – the very kind of parochialism that Robert Cox viewed as evidence of hegemonic decline.¹⁸²

Conclusion

¹⁸⁰ The White House, ‘Presidential Memorandum Regarding Withdrawal of the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Negotiations and Agreement’, 23 January 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-regarding-withdrawal-united-states-trans-pacific-partnership-negotiations-agreement/>.

¹⁸¹ The White House, ‘Remarks by President Trump at Signing of the Memorandum Regarding the Investigation Pursuant to Section 232(B) of the Trade Expansion Act’, 20 April 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-signing-memorandum-regarding-investigation-pursuant-section-232b-trade-expansion-act/>.

¹⁸² Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, p. 245.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership was largely the creation of the United States, backed by key sectors of US-based (transnational) capital. As the global financial crisis and subsequent recession problematized the durability of US power, Washington intended the TPP as a catalyst for the kind of (neo)liberalization that would reconstitute the very structural advantages that have underpinned the United States' postwar hegemony. The economic face of the Obama administration's pivot to Asia, the TPP was partly a response to China's rival trade agenda. Beyond this, it was a mechanism to extend neoliberal rules in the global economy and jump-start the momentum behind a stalled liberalization agenda. Although the Trump administration's decision to pull out of the TPP does not in and of itself suggest that a new international trade order is on offer, Trump's neomercantilism does 'indeed challenge the stability of the normative order in international trade'.¹⁸³ From the view of conventional IR/IPE scholarship, characterized largely by rationalist and statist theoretical commitments, the United States' decision to withdraw from the TPP is puzzling, not only because it damaged the US-led liberal order, but also because it ceded structural leverage to a strategic rival, China. The preceding discussion has advanced a critical view, one which connects the mega-trade deal to class, ideology, and the bottom-up actions of non-elite sectors. This provides an alternative understanding of the origins of the TPP as a hegemonic project which can also account for its eventual uncoupling from US power.

Following the US withdrawal, the revamped CPTPP appeared to re-create some momentum for trade liberalization at a time when global trends were pointing in the opposite direction. However, the inability of the Obama administration, bipartisan backers in Congress, and supporters in the business lobby to implement the original agreement is illustrative of a crisis of US hegemony. It left the door open for the Chinese model of trade governance to gain

¹⁸³ Zhao Yujia, 'Is There a New International Trade Order?' *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2019), p. 96.

traction in Asia and elsewhere. The narrower scope of the revised rules cut against the interests of US-based transnational capital, though ‘trade and investment rules in areas such as e-commerce and SOEs established in the CPTPP help(ed) advance US objectives even without (US) participation’.¹⁸⁴ According to one estimate, while the original TPP would have netted the US a \$131 billion income gain, under the ‘TPP11’ the US economy stood to lose approximately \$2 billion.¹⁸⁵ The text of the new agreement suspended (rather than revoked) the more controversial elements that were ‘removed’ from the TPP, meaning it would be relatively straightforward from a technical standpoint for the US to re-join. This cannot be ruled out. However, such a scenario would seem to rest not only on a profound shift in the politics of trade within Washington, but also in the common sense understandings of globalization among the mass public. The broader consensus would need to be rebuilt.

Although elite ideas constitute the specific policies used to maintain and/or extend hegemonic relationships, these ideas need to find continual resonance with groups outside of the elite orbit. Indeed, ‘common sense’, in its fuller conceptualization, is an important feature of hegemony, though one that has been overlooked.¹⁸⁶ A consensus perpetuated by policy elites can be challenged in ambiguous ways. This bottom-up rejection need not entail a fully-formed counter-hegemonic movement or ‘war of position’, in Gramscian terms. It can take on more eclectic expressions, with the vagaries of ‘everyday’ politics fostering new and unanticipated contradictions. The resulting confusion can exacerbate ‘organic’ crises that may be structural in origin. The populist critiques of the TPP did not coalesce into a progressive, pro-worker trade policy on the part of the United States, but they were sufficient

¹⁸⁴ Mathew P. Goodman, ‘From TPP to CPTPP’, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 8 March 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/tpp-cptpp>.

¹⁸⁵ Peter A. Petri, Michael G. Plummer, Shujiro Urata, and Fan Zhai, ‘Going It Alone in the Asia-Pacific: Regional Trade Agreements without the United States’, Peterson Institute for International Economics, Working Paper, October 2017, p. 8.

¹⁸⁶ Hopf, ‘Common-sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics’.

to damage the TPP as a hegemonic project, raising further questions about the leadership of the United States within the international political economy.