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Understanding the future of the transatlantic
relation: The impact of Donald Trump's
populist foreign policy rhetoric on the US
Congress' debates on NATO

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ABSTRACT:

After his election in 2016, Donald Trump became the first president to openly question whether Europe was in America's interests, and his blatant disregard for the historical ties with the other side of the Atlantic found in NATO the perfect target. This thesis aims to contribute to knowledge on the field by conducting a study on the potential impact that the populist foreign policy rhetoric of the 45th President of the United States had on the Congress' bipartisan consensus on NATO, by examining if Trump's narrative on the alliance was replicated by Congress members. Understanding this becomes crucial at a time when the US support for its European counterparts is the cornerstone of the international world order and the key partnership to overcome global challenges ahead. The chosen methodology is a two-step deductive-inductive discourse analysis, that first analyzes a sample of Trump's public statements to extract his main arguments on NATO, to then create a codebook that is used to identify the appearance of these arguments in the US Congress' debates and hearings on NATO. In light of the sample material analyzed, it can be safely argued that the political actors in the House of Representatives of the US Congress do not fully reproduce Trump's populist arguments used to criticize the alliance. Even though all of Trump's main arguments come up in the discussion from members of both sides of the political spectrum, they do so only occasionally, while the arguments supporting NATO are much more frequent and vehement.

ABSTRAKT:

Po swoim wyborze w 2016 roku Donald Trump stał się pierwszym prezydentem, który otwarcie zakwestionował, czy Europa leży w interesie Ameryki, a jego jawne lekceważenie historycznych więzi z drugą stroną Atlantyku znalazło w NATO idealny cel. Niniejsza praca ma na celu poszerzenie wiedzy w tej dziedzinie poprzez przeprowadzenie badania potencjalnego wpływu populistycznej retoryki polityki zagranicznej 45. prezydenta Stanów Zjednoczonych na dwupartyjny konsensus Kongresu w sprawie NATO, poprzez sprawdzenie, czy narracja Trumpa na temat sojuszu była powielana przez członków Kongresu. Zrozumienie tej kwestii staje się kluczowe w czasach, gdy wsparcie USA dla ich europejskich partnerów jest kamieniem węgielnym międzynarodowego porządku światowego i kluczowym partnerstwem pozwalającym

przewyciężyć globalne wyzwania. Wybrana metodologia to dwuetapowa dedukcyjno-indukcyjna analiza dyskursu, w ramach której najpierw analizuje się próbkę publicznych wypowiedzi Trumpa, aby wyodrębnić jego główne argumenty na temat NATO, a następnie tworzy się książkę kodową, która służy do identyfikacji pojawienia się tych argumentów w debatach i przesłuchaniach w Kongresie USA na temat NATO. W świetle przeanalizowanego przykładowego materiału można śmiało stwierdzić, że aktorzy polityczni w Izbie Reprezentantów Kongresu USA nie w pełni odtwarzają populistyczne argumenty Trumpa wykorzystywane do krytyki Sojuszu. Mimo że wszystkie główne argumenty Trumpa pojawiają się w dyskusjach członków obu stron politycznego spektrum, czynią to jedynie sporadycznie, podczas gdy argumenty wspierające NATO są znacznie częstsze i bardziej gwałtowne.

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1. BACKGROUND AND THEORY:

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The 2016 US presidential election, that saw Donald Trump, a multi-millionaire, businessman and TV reality celebrity who had never held public office before becoming the 45th President of the United States, will be remembered in the annals of history as a turning point in US political tradition. His campaign has been described as aggressive, divisive, and even populist, and the unexpected victory in the polls caused a wave of shock and fear abroad, raising questions not only about the new President's foreign policy but also about the future role of the US in global affairs (Langlois, 2018).

After he took over the Oval Office on January 20, 2017; the US' foreign policy external purposes, internal cohesion and chances of success were questioned. Trump had assessed that the American public craved relief from the burdens of global leadership but without giving up the thrill of nationalist self-assertion, and he catered to that. He came up with a hopped-up version of foreign policy activism combined with a determined disengagement from the multilateralist order, creating a sort of radicalism at both ends of the spectrum that appealed to the American voters: For Trump, American policy was supposed to serve only American interests (Sestanovich, 2017).

He was outwardly hostile, and the first president to openly question whether the EU was in America's interests. This broke from the American foreign policy tradition shaped immediately after the Second World War, when the partnership with Europe became the key strategic relationship and most important postwar alliance for the US. The country undertook the mission to protect Europe from the '*looming Soviet peril*', taking on the role of the indispensable sponsor for the continent's economic reconstruction as they acknowledged the importance of a stable, free, and prosperous Europe for the US' foreign policy and security interests. The creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the fact that, despite all difficulties endured in the Cold War and the disappearance of its main enemy in 1991, it survived and found a new purpose (by becoming a sort of reassurance policy in case of a resurgent Russia) evidences that the US has always regarded the other side of the Atlantic as a crucial diplomatic and strategic theatre, "*one with which the US was linked not only by vital economic and security interests, but also by a common culture and common values*" (Hoffmann, 2003, p. 1030).

Trump's blatant disregard for the historical ties with Europe found in NATO the perfect target, and the President took on to create his own narrative on the organization: he called NATO '*obsolete*' and threatened with pulling out of the alliance if his European counterparts did not dramatically increase their levels of spending to reach the 2% of GDP threshold (Wright, 2017).

Considering the relevance and implications of the topic, the research question to be addressed in this thesis is the following:

“Did Donald Trump’s populist foreign policy rhetoric impact the congressional discourse on the US Congress’ debates on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)?”

Addressing this question becomes relevant because of its implications for the future of the transatlantic relation. This thesis aims to contribute to knowledge on the field by conducting a study on the potential damage that was caused on the U.S. Congress bipartisan consensus on NATO by the populist foreign policy rhetoric pursued by the 45th President of the US, to analyse if the long-established agreement on the importance of the alliance diminished or changed. Understanding this becomes crucial in a time when the US support for its European counterparts is the cornerstone of the international world order, and the key partnership to overcome global challenges ahead.

The present work is divided in 3 sections: The first section includes the theoretical chapters: an introduction, three background chapters on transatlantic relations and NATO, populist foreign policy and on Donald Trump himself, and a final chapter on methodology. The second section constitutes the empirical analysis, and it is divided into two chapters: the former examines ten of Donald Trump's public appearances and speeches to extract his main arguments on NATO and creates a codebook, while the latter applies said codebook to congressional debates on the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives and on the main floor of the chamber and presents the findings of the research. The thesis concludes with a final chapter dedicated to the conclusions, followed by the bibliography and annex.

1.2 TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND NATO:

“For seven decades the transatlantic partnership has been the bedrock of the post-World War II international order grounded in the United States and Europe’s shared commitment to freedom, democracy, human rights, rule of law and open trade. Anchored in a network of transatlantic-centered institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Community and later the European Union, as well as international organizations such as the IMF or the WTO, the transatlantic relationship was built to provide the normative grounds on which the liberal international order would rest” (Dimitrova, 2016, p. 1).

The historically close ideological, economic, political and security-related ties between America and Europe made both sides of the Atlantic inevitably bounded to be each other’s most natural partner, a relationship that acquired great relevance after the end of World War II. Once the conflict was over, and in a quest to prevent anything remotely similar from ever happening again, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in 1949 as a ‘*security community*’ in which the member states shared the common values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law. This provided the basis to create a collective identity that went beyond the initial strategic and military considerations, something that strengthened the alliance and fostered a close cooperation among the allies that expanded to many other areas outside of the security scope (Nielsen & Dimitrova, 2021).

The ‘*transatlantic bargain*’ not only granted security guarantees but also became the expression of allies placing trust in each other, a factor that has been acknowledged as crucial for interstate cooperation, as it increases cohesion and promotes collective action. As Nielsen and Dimitrova (2021, p. 704) point out, “*encapsulating the other side’s interests in their own became the norm on both sides of the Atlantic*”, something that US President Harry Truman had in mind when he requested the Senate to ratify NATO, by reminding them that the security and welfare of each member of the community depended on the security and welfare of all (Oztig, 2020).

The years that followed, immersed in the turbulent international context of the Cold War against the Soviet threat, saw an increased transatlantic cooperation in the face of a common enemy. When it vanished with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991,

many wondered if NATO could survive the disappearance of the crucial factor that bound its members together, its *raison d'être*. The strategic concept that was published in that same year vouched to maintain its unity and cohesion and stressed the importance of the alliance to face the emerging security challenges of the 21st century: multi-faceted, multi-directional and difficult to predict and evaluate. To adapt to the post-Cold War era, the organization changed its course and found a new purpose: to maintain peace and prevent war, strengthening the security of its member states in the face of new risks such as ethnic conflicts and state failure, nuclear proliferation and economic crises (Oztig, 2020).

And even though there was a lot of uncertainty surrounding the initial post-Cold War years, the George H. W. Bush administration (in charge of overseeing the transition from one security paradigm to another) reassured the European allies that the US remained committed to both the military and the political leadership of NATO. In Washington D.C., the organization was still regarded as a vital institution through which the US was able to influence the political and security environment in Europe, something that was crucial to assure the US' own security. The next occupant of the White House, Bill Clinton, further revitalized the alliance by vehemently supporting NATO's enlargement to central and eastern European countries, in line with his commitment to liberal multilateralism (Oztig, 2020).

During George W. Bush's presidency there were certain events that shaped NATO's fate: The organization's expansion to the Balkan regions and the Baltic states, the deepening in NATO-Russia relations and the invocation of Article 5 in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (for the first and only time in history) brought the NATO allies closer together and reaffirmed the US' commitment to the alliance, as well as the strong support from Europeans to the US' 'War on Terror' (Oztig, 2020). Nonetheless, this sense of solidarity started to wear thin when numerous European leaders expressed their opposition to the invasion of Iraq, an act that some interpreted as the US' willingness to disregard the concerns of some of its key allies and an apparent detachment from multilateralism, and even as a departure from the previously shared values and priorities. In spite of this, it should be noted that both sides of the Atlantic continued the support for the partnership even at the depth of the fallout, and the core commitments enshrined in NATO were never called into question due to disagreements over Iraq (Nielsen & Dimitrova, 2021).

The next round of presidential elections saw Barak Obama become the 45th President of the United States and brought about a period in which the transatlantic

partnership did not particularly thrive but did not sink either. Rather than giving priority to his European allies, Barak Obama focused on withdrawing the US from the Middle East (Iraq and Afghanistan) and redirected the US strategic interests toward Asia, while the other side of the Atlantic tried to keep its economies afloat in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis (Oztig, 2020).

Considering all of the above, it can be argued that despite occasional disagreements and rocky patches down the road, both NATO and the transatlantic relationship had been able to successfully adjust to the new political and security challenges of the post-Cold War era. The organization has embraced enlargement and cooperation with non-member countries and adopted a new sense of purpose by shifting its focus to peacekeeping, conflict prevention and crisis management (Oztig, 2020). The existence of a number of shock absorbers, such as a complex economic interdependence, a web of institutionalized partnerships, and common threat perceptions on both sides of the Atlantic such as Russia and international terrorism, mitigate the effects of any crisis the alliance has had to endure (Kanat, 2018).

However, Donald Trump's victory on the polls, even if the effects of his appearance on the political arena were visible long before the election, triggered what has been labelled as a phenomenon of "*transatlantic panic*". And despite the fact that the history of transatlantic tensions is as old as the alliance itself, many saw the foundations of the cooperation between the two superpowers crumbling, almost on the verge of collapse (Brands and Feaver, 2018). Against the backdrop of an international political context in which the paradigms of protectionism, nationalism and unilateralism grew exponentially, and were all embodied by the person who was about to become the President of the United States of America, many wondered if there was any place left for the transatlantic alliance, or NATO itself (Langlois, 2018).

His disregard for the importance of the alliance was seen by many as a direct attack against the liberal international order (Ikenberry, 2018). As European Council President Donald Tusk confessed, "*What worries me most [...] is the fact that the rules-based international order is being challenged. Quite surprisingly, not by the usual suspects, but by its main architect and guarantor, the US*" (Tusk, 2018).

Many scholars have tried to discern if the noticeable deterioration in transatlantic relations after 2016 could be ascribed solely to President Trump's actions, and many agree on one thing: that the problems the alliance faced went beyond the influence of a single occupant of the Oval Office. Contrary to what has been presented earlier in this

chapter, some authors like Aggestam and Hyde-Price (2019, p. 114) argue in their work that both sides of the Atlantic had been drifting apart for over three decades, “*as the glue provided by US existential security guarantees to Europe disappeared with the end of the Cold War. This brought to the fore pre-existing and underlying differences over a range of policy domains—from the Balkans and the Middle East to trade and security cooperation, which have steadily weakened transatlantic ties*”. Once the “Soviet threat” was out of the way, the U.S. drastically reduced both the military power and defense budget allocated to NATO to just 3% of their GDP in 2009, down from 9% back in 1989. Furthermore, America’s foreign policy strategy of multilateralism was gradually replaced by unilateralism in the international sphere with the turn of the century (Bağbaşıoğlu, 2021).

In the words of Polyakova & Haddad (2019, para. 2), “*The rift between the United States and Europe did not begin with Trump, nor will it end with him*”, and Obama’s administration was already a proof to that, fixated as it was on the rise of China. Back in November 2001, the then US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton made a public appearance in Honolulu, Hawaii, titled “*America’s Pacific Century*”. In it, the concept of the US ‘pivot’ to Asia was coined, with which she stated that the strategic and economic center of gravity of the international sphere had shifted to the Asia Pacific region, and that would be where the diplomatic, economic and strategic efforts of the US would be focused, instead of Europe (Clinton, 2011). These statements were followed up in practice with a decrease in military presence and overall US engagement in Europe, a rebalancing to Asia that became one more symptom of the decreased American interest in Europe (Pettersson, 2018). It also signaled that the US refused to adopt the type of leadership that the Europeans had become used to and wanted them to take greater responsibility for themselves (Nielsen & Dimitrova, 2021).

And even long before that, NATO itself had already received its fair share of criticism. The burden-sharing issue has been a longstanding debate inside of the organization, dating as far back as the early 1950s, when political and military leaders on the other side of the Atlantic voiced their distress about the dependence of European nations on U.S. security presence in Europe, requesting their European counterparts to increase their national defense budgets and take on their part of the transatlantic security burden. The ‘Mansfield Resolutions’, introduced by Senator Mike Mansfield in the late 1960s and early 70s aimed at substantially reducing the number of US troops stationed in

Europe, perhaps one of the most evident examples of the pressure America has been trying to exert on the European allies for decades (Bağbaşıoğlu, 2021)

These contrasting views indicate that there has undeniably been an erosion of the long-standing EU-US alliance since its inception, one that is completely understandable when looking at everything the partnership has had to endure over the years, with the added difficulty of finding a common ground for the positions and interests of different nations. However, there has always been efforts on both sides of the Atlantic that have helped the alliance overcome all these internal and external challenges. The arrival of Donald Trump to the White House, on the other hand, with his transactional view of foreign policy, his absolute contempt for allies and multilateral organizations, unreliable behavior as President and his disparaging and damaging rhetoric posed a completely new challenge, one the alliance had never faced before. NATO became the main target of his attacks, and as Nielsen and Dimitrova point out (2021, p. 700): “*Unlike his predecessors, Trump had turned traditional US irritation with NATO’s inherent power asymmetry into a full-blown shouting match with his strident demands for greater European expenditures and his harsh criticism of European NATO members’ free riding on US security guarantees*”. At this point, the doubts many had raised about the future of the transatlantic alliance seemed to be well-founded.

1.3 POPULISM AND FOREIGN POLICY:

1.3.1 Theorizing the impossible: Populism as a discourse practice

“Populism is much more than discourse, but it is mainly through discourse that it is enacted” (Hidalgo-Tenorio, Benítez-Castro and De Cesare, 2019, p. 7)

“Without an understanding of populism, we cannot fully comprehend Trump’s foreign policy rhetoric” (Hall, 2021, p. 51)

Most of the literature that has been written and published about populism, that has become extensive due to the concept’s emerging centrality in the current political landscape, has one thing in common: It always highlights the fact that it is almost impossible to find a consensus on the definition of such a contested term. In the words of Argentine political theorist and philosopher Ernesto Laclau, *“a persistent feature of the literature on populism is its reluctance – or difficulty – in giving the concept any precise meaning”* (Laclau, 2005, p. 3).

This slippery concept has been defined in a plethora of ways: As a model of leadership or governance, as an ideology, or as a discursive frame (the latter by authors like Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Hawkins, 2009; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Poblete, 2015 or Bonikowski and Gidron, 2016), among others. For the purposes of this research, Ekström, Patrona, & Thornborrow’s (2018, p. 2) double-sided understanding of populism becomes the most relevant:

“We perceive populism as both a political discourse, or ‘thin-centered ideology’, representing politics and society as structured by a fundamental antagonistic relationship between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’ (...); and the performance of anti-establishment stances and identities, and claims to being one of ‘the people’, in which the dynamic processes of styling are absolutely central”

And they are not the only ones that approach the definition of populism from a political communication perspective: It has also been defined by others as discourse practice (Laclau, 2005), as a style of political rhetoric (Kazin, 2017) or as a specific political communication style or frame that appeals to and identifies with the people (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Other key theorists of populism like Margaret Canovan, that

has conducted research on the topic for over three decades, describe it as a rhetorical style that relies heavily upon appeals to the people (Canovan, 1984).

Against this theoretical backdrop, and while still acknowledging that populism can have various manifestations and present different features, a discursive and performative approach is most suitable for the work at hand, since it focuses on the instrumental use of language and the rhetoric and framing practices of a subject (Biegon, 2019). Similar to other authors in the field, this study avoids the conceptual debates on populism that have proliferated in the literature and rather focuses on the rhetorical core of the phenomenon. As Biegon (2019, p. 533) so rightly notes in his work, “*Understood as a discursive style rather than an ideology or model, populism serves as a useful conceptual foundation for examining US grand strategy under the Trump administration*”.

An attribute of populism that is necessary to go back to from Ekström, Patrona, & Thornborrow’s definition is that of ‘*thin-centered*’. Understood as a discursive practice, populism becomes a ‘thin layer’ that lays on top of a ‘thick’ ideological disposition (be it leftist, rightist or centrist, with its associated level of extremeness), an ideologically ambiguous approach that makes populism suitable for many different political stances (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). According to some scholars, the recent success of populist movements has more to do with the discursive distinctiveness they pursue, by breaking the norms and conventions of public and political communication, than with traditional political ideological differences (Ekström, Patrona, & Thornborrow, 2018). Nonetheless, populism as political communication strategy can still constitute a means to frame specific ideological commitments: It can naturalize any ideology by linking it to the legitimacy that the people provide, including certain political ideas and convictions associated with elite interests. When these are framed strategically, they can be labelled as common sense through their attribution to the ‘folk culture’ (Biegon, 2019).

The way that populism works as a ‘thin-centered’ discursive practice was summarized in the work of Canovan, that gathered the different features it comprises: It uses very simple, democratic language; makes constant references to ‘the people’; carefully adjusts to the logics of the media environment that surrounds it; identifies a shared enemy or “the other”; and is embodied in a charismatic and redemptive leader that personifies provocation and antagonism (Hidalgo-Tenorio, Benítez-Castro & De Cesare, 2019). Another aspect that Magcamit (2017) capture in his work as one of the

performative elements of populism is the coarsening of political language or ‘bad manners’, present in many populist statements and speeches.

1.3.2 Populist foreign policy

Many scholars point out the fact that, even though much has been written about populism as a political phenomenon, there has been little effort in the field to try and conceptualize or grasp the impact of populist ideology on foreign policy and national security. This connection has been underexplored, and theory-driven analysis of the implications of populist-led governments for a country’s foreign policy are scarce in foreign policy analysis (FPA). But despite the fact that it has garnered relatively little attention, the prominent role of foreign policy matters in the campaigns of populist leaders proves that populism is not merely restricted to the domestic sphere, but also has international implications (Boucher & Thies, 2019, Hall, 2021; Plagemann & Destradi, 2019; Verbeek & Haslove, 2017, Löfflmann, 2019)

To fully understand how populist conceptions inform foreign policy preferences and translate into the concrete choices that define the nation’s purpose and interests in the global sphere, it is important to go back to the notion of ‘the people’ that emerged in the core definition of populism. In the foreign policy realm, populism becomes the discursive strategy that allows the (re)production of the notion of ‘*people*’ through a process of ‘negative Othering’, that is, pitching them against a foreign ‘*other*’ such as the globalist, elitist establishment or international players seen as adversaries. It is a judgment of foreign policy in terms of the elite-people divide (Wojczewski, 2020; Friedrichs, 2022).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that there is not a single and consistent populist foreign policy or ‘*populist playbook*’ on foreign affairs. Instead, there is different range of positions across the populist spectrum, and the differences depend on the attached ideology that comes with it. As Verbeek & Zaslove (2017) point out, the thin-centered ideology of populism forces it to seek an ‘*ideological bedfellow*’, which dictates their position on international challenges and thus, their foreign policy positions. This ‘thick’ ideology, or political orientation, is the deciding factor that ultimately determines the specific foreign policy choices of the populist parties or their leaders, for example, making the populist radical right more inclined to be isolationist in broader terms, protectionist in trade and finance matters and strongly opposed to immigration and cultural globalization.

One of the few things we can find as a common ground for both left-wing and right-wing populist discourses is the concept of ‘*threatened sovereignty*’ as a constitutive theme in foreign policy. With it, populist leaders portray the political environment they are placed in as one of crisis and instability, besieged by external elites who are characterized as attempting to deprive the sovereign people of not only their rights, but also their identity, their values and their prosperity. The populist leader, therefore, adopts a restorative foreign policy, that aims to replace the existing corruption with a new political rule that puts the people back in their legitimate place and prioritizes their needs and aspirations (Boucher & Thies, 2019). The fact that populists politicize world politics in the same exact way that they radicalize domestic politics, framed in a people vs. elite antagonism that puts the will and sovereignty of the people first against international consensus, cooperation and even institutional checks and balances implies that populist logic of international affairs is sovereignty oriented, and has many times been labelled as nationalistic (Chrysogelos, 2017; Wojczewski, 2020).

The work of Drezner (2017) proves really insightful in trying to identify the potential traits of a populist foreign policy in a broad sense, independent to its underlying thick ideology. For example, the inherent resistance of populist leaders towards multilateralism and international institutions, regarded as a product of a transnational elite, due to their tendency to avoid any type of alternative center of power that escapes their personal control and constrains their room to maneuver. On the other hand, and as Plagemann & Destradi (2019) also argue, bilateral agreements give the leaders a chance to directly convey the will of the people, of which they are the sole legitimate representatives, and to reinforce their claim for status, something that makes these arrangements the preferred *modus operandi* for populists in power.

These leaders are also likely to develop a greater appetite for risk-taking in foreign affairs, as they reject the pre-existing liberal international order and global governance structures and have tendencies that align more with a revolutionary profile than that of an established politician. And contrary to conventional foreign policy leaders, that are advised to stick to the conventional diplomatic discourse, populists completely disregard the norms and rely on the kind of language that appeals to their base, and that many times implies disrespecting other heads of state, organizations and international players. Even though they crave external recognition in their quest to build their legitimacy, populists disparage those they perceive as adversaries in the international arena and attempt

constant displays of dominance over them, a way to conduct diplomacy that only increases polarization and isolation (Drezner, 2017).

Another common trait of the foreign policy of populists in power is the decision-making process behind their policy choices. As opposed to a non-populist leader, theirs tends to be much more centralized and personalistic, providing few to none formalized opportunities for alternative points of view and perspectives in foreign policy making. This is due to their tendency to portray a singular leader as the embodiment of the people, and to their skepticism of the established elite in the field of foreign policy (Plagemann & Destradi, 2019).

An additional aspect that should not be ignored, even though most of IR theory focuses on the premise that individual leaders do not have a relevant impact in world politics, is the fact that recent research suggests otherwise, at least when it comes to foreign policy. According to it, the traits of individual leaders affect their country's approach to international relations and foreign affairs, especially in the case of populists (Drezner, 2017).

Therefore, a deductive approach shows that the theoretical reflection on populism above can be applied to Donald Trump's rhetoric and used to push further this research, since the key elements that emerge on the President's narrative (simple and divisive language, constant references to the people, identification of a shared enemy, and the embodiment of the solution of the nation's problems in a charismatic and redemptive leader) are also those that define populist policymaking.

Now that the specific understanding of populism that will guide this study has been established, as well as its overlap with foreign policy, it is time to unravel President Trump's own brand of populism, and more precisely, the implications it has on his take on international affairs.

1.4 THE DONALD TRUMP CASE: An analysis of his foreign policy

On January 20th, 2017, most of the frontpages and opening pieces of media outlets around the world showed the same image, reporting live from Washington D.C: Donald John Trump, fist pumped in the air, after delivering his inauguration speech in the ceremony that sworn him in as the 46th President of the United States of America. Soon after that, wide-spread concern emerged in many different corners of the world: For the first time in history, the US would be led by a candidate that had no prior political or military experience, having never served public office or served in the military, plus no background in government affairs or the international political sphere, as opposed to most of his predecessors in past presidential runs (Rahajeng, 2019). As Drezner (2017) notes, “*Trump’s lack of experience is matched only by his lack of knowledge about foreign policy*”.

In many of the interviews he granted during his presidential campaign, Trump displayed little understanding of key foreign policy issues and ignorance of vital concepts related to international affairs. It has been pointed out that he had great difficulty to attract experienced national security advisers to his administration’s team, and then, bereft of informed foreign policy advice, continued to issue erratic statements that rattled international powers and political risk analysis (Drezner, 2017).

To make matters worse, many saw Trump reflected in the textbook definitions of the populist leader, one who presents himself as “*the ‘true’ democrat fighting to claw back the people’s sovereignty and control over its own destiny from corrupt, incompetent and far-away elites*” (McDonnell, 2017, p. 27), a charismatic individual whose narrative claims to be the embodiment of the popular will, for he is of the people and speaks for the people. Populist leaders use this narrative to challenge the checks and balances of the liberal democracy, arguing that these controls alter the people’s sovereign will (McDonnell, 2017). All of this defines quite properly the role Trump adopted on his quest after the Oval Office, granting him the title of ‘*populist par excellence*’ in Oliver and Rahn’s work (2016).

As Trump himself stated in an op-ed published by the Wall Street Journal in 2016: “*The only antidote to decades of ruinous rule by a small handful of elites is a bold infusion of popular will. On every major issue affecting this country, the people are right and the governing elite are wrong. The elites are wrong on taxes, on the size of government, on trade, on immigration, on foreign policy*” (Trump, 2016). This also resonates with one of

the most widely accepted definitions of populism, that of Cas Mudde, in which society is ultimately separated into two antagonistic bodies, the ‘*pure people*’ pitched against the ‘*corrupt elites*’, and which makes the case that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, 2004).

But who is ‘*the people*’? According to Kazin, there exist two different, competing populist traditions in the United States. Even though both blame elites and their enablers for betraying the interests of the men and women of the nation, the first one embraces a more leftist conception of ‘*the people*’ based on class, while the second one (the racial-nationalist strain, the one to which Trump belongs), has a narrower, more ethnically restrictive definition of that same group, the ‘*real Americans*’, those of European descent (Kazin, 2016). Trump’s populism is clearly rightist, breaking from the historical tradition of populism in the United States that has its roots on the left-wing movements of the late 19th century, and putting him closer to the European lineage.

For the research at hand, it is crucial to note that Trump’s populist rhetoric spilled over into foreign policy, an area that had remained relatively bipartisan until then and to which most American populists in the past had not paid that much attention as they tended to focus more on domestic policy (Boucher & Thies, 2019; Rahajeng, 2020). As some ideational approaches argue, populist ideology is articulated around three essential ideas: anti-elitism, a threatened ‘*people*’, and a dangerous ‘*other*’ who jeopardizes their sovereignty. In Trump’s foreign policy discourse the American people are victims not just of the elites but also of foreign countries, where former major trading partners and allies are now characterized as enemies taking advantage of the US (Aydin-Düzgüt & Keyman, 2017). In the words of Löfflmann (2019, p. 120), “*Trump’s world view casts the realm of international relations almost exclusively as one of existential threats, escalating danger and aggressive economic competition – a zero-sum game in which the United States had to compete against all other actors, regardless of whether they were liberal democracies or authoritarian regimes, in order to secure its own survival and prosperity*”.

Hafner-Burton, Narang & Rathbun (2019) describe his foreign policy as populist in the sense that it is simple, moralistic and emotional, a so-called ‘*policy of moral grievances*’: he uses the international victimization narrative, common to many other populist movements, complaining about the fairness (or lack of) of existing alliance arrangements and portraying a scenario in which other international actors are taking advantage of the United States. His foreign policy rhetoric also has attempted to create a

sense of crisis (as many populist movements do) to mobilize his domestic base and generate political support, and the best example to that can be spotted in the realm of overseas counterterrorism campaigns, known as the '*War on Terror*' (Hall, 2021).

Moreover, his take on foreign policy mixes a message of isolationism with militaristic and interventionist appeals, and it is embedded in Jacksonianism, an ideological strand of American populism whose vision of '*national greatness*' was translated in the realm of foreign policymaking to an aggressive tendency rooted in the veneration of military power and the protection of the ethnic, racial and cultural bonds of the community, with little regard for international law or multilateral institutions. His foreign policy approach is purely transactional, nationalist and neo-mercantilist, using an antagonistic framing against former allies that "*attempts to leverage coercive power in the service of a narrower understanding of national interests*" (Biegon, 2019, p. 533). As Mudde argues in his work, right-wing populists portray the outside world as a hostile place and therefore support an inherent distrust of any external groups, through the rhetorical demonization of outsiders (Mudde, 2007).

His particular brand and vision of right-wing American populism, labelled '*America First*', completely ignored the two main pillars of the US grand strategy tradition (multilateralism and globalism), and replaced them with '*Americanism*', a protectionist nationalism that was predominated over global governance and shared values (Nielsen & Dimitrova, 2021). With this approach, Trump successfully identified the need to not only exploit not only the emotional triggers of fear, anger, and resentment but also to tap into the "*long-standing disconnect between elite and public opinion on the appropriate degree of US global engagement*" (Löfflmann, 2019, p. 119). This came as a stark break with the liberal Wilsonian tradition of US foreign policy and emphasized the idea of an overextension of US engagement and existing foreign commitments in the international sphere (Löfflmann, 2019). For the former president, the use of populist rhetoric allowed him to justify the main goals of his foreign policy by directly tying them to the domestic priorities he deemed of utmost importance to the people of America (namely job creation, economic growth and border security), and by claiming that he had begun the process of restoring the '*long-lost*' respect for the US in the international arena as the key political and economic power (Lacatus, 2021).

This '*America First*' war cry, a sort of mantra that became the embodiment of Trump's core beliefs, can be summarized as a stark opposition to the US's alliance arrangements and to free trade, support for a mercantilist global economic system, and

endorsement for authoritarianism, in particular Russia's (Wright, 2016b). In the foreign policy realm, it translated into a series of foreign policy choices that only worsened the EU's burden: Never before seen offenses like calling the EU a '*foe*', the celebration of Brexit and encouragement for other members states to leave the Union, embracing authoritarian leaders like Orbán while at the same time bullying democratic presidents like Merkel, refusing to re-engage with the TTIP agenda, imposing '*national security*' tariffs on EU imports or retreating from major treaties like the Paris Climate deal, the WHO, or the Iran Nuclear Deal as well as openly attacking the WTO (Blockmans, Evenett et al., 2021). Trump's vision of the world as a battlefield blatantly opposed the common foreign policy ideology of the EU, that is based on multilateralism, protection of international law and responsible cooperation, and it questioned the very liberal values of European integration (Asaturov and Martynov, 2020).

According to Petersson (2018), the US under Trump's guidance became a '*reluctant ally*', a power for which competition rather than cooperation has become the guiding principle of its foreign policy. Former NATO Ambassador Nicholas Burns also warned that Trump was the first president of the United States after 1945 that does not want to take on the role of being the leader of the democratic West, and instead regards his European counterparts purely as competitors (Burns, 2017). He completely disregards international institutions, choosing bilateral agreements over multilateral cooperation, something he finds antithetical to US interests. For Trump, the cost-benefit calculations outweigh the prevalence of the norms of the transatlantic partnership (Oztig, 2020).

A final aspect that should also be mentioned is the way that Trump made unpredictability and uncertainty be considered the defining characteristics of the US attitude towards the European continent, due to his tendency to do anything by adhere to the expected norms of presidential behavior. This becomes problematic as predictability of behavior is one of the key aspects on which a trusting relationship between or among international players is built, and it is related to the institutionalized rules that these actors have to comply with (Kanat, 2018; Nielsen & Dimitrova, 2021)

1.4.1 The populist rhetoric dimension of Trump's foreign policy

“‘Trumpism’ is all about rhetoric” (Lacatus, 2021, p. 33).

The surge of populist right-wing discourses all over the globe, reaching the political mainstream, has indicated a major shift in discursive dynamics, one marked by “*the transition to an era in which shameless rhetoric, blatant lies, and bad manners prevail – without any consequences*” (Çolak, 2022, p. 133) and where populists instrumentalize fear against the backdrop of an increased social polarization. In this context, distinctive discursive strategies emerge as the tools that allow them to set their agenda (Çolak, 2022).

Trump's rhetoric towards Europe on the campaign trail, often described with unheard-of adjectives for a President's conduct such as aggressive, stinging, scornful, disdainful, disruptive, provocative, unpredictable and unprecedented, shook the foundations of the transatlantic alliance. His improvised and explosive discourse broke through the boundaries of traditional presidential discourse in a clear divergence from the norms of campaign rhetoric, and it didn't stop there. The uncertainty build-up that followed Trump's election and arrival to the White House was fueled by the continuation of his disparaging remarks and overall disregard for the mutual EU-US recognition that was forged over decades of cooperation, that not only persisted but even escalated (Blanc, 2021).

Denby (2015, para. 1-3) accurately describes Trump's discursive style:

“At times ecstatic, relying on emotional connections alone, he leaps from subject to subject. (...) His speeches have no beginning or end, no shape, no culmination and release, and none is necessary. For the audience, his fervent incoherence makes him that much more present, for it is Trump alone who matters, the vividness of him standing there, in that moment, embodying what the audience fears and desires.”

His narrative acts as the conduit that channels the feeling of frustration that emanates from being left behind or even laughed at by the elites, the President's worst fear, and it puts the blame on a wide array of ‘others’, that include liberal institutions like NATO (Skonieczny, 2021).

The former President's ability to exploit a multitude of rhetorical ploys, including emotionally appealing storylines, combined with the way that he changed and challenged the content, style and norms of US foreign policy discourse created a sense of anxiety on the other side of the Atlantic, as it is expected that foreign policy of the elected candidate will, customarily, follow its rhetoric. Trump conducted a purely instrumental use of rhetoric, employing his far-right populist discourse to advance foreign policy claims not only of isolationism but also of illiberalism, and perpetuating a sense of crisis and of urgency to protect American interests at all costs to which only him, as a populist leader, could offer a solution (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021; Appel, 2018).

In the words of Skonieczny (2021, p. 127), "*The challenge of making sense of how rhetoric impacts foreign policy in an age of Trump is a daunting one given that Trump is a president who uses unprecedented and often unmediated rhetoric, appears to be always on the campaign trail and vacillates wildly in the foreign policy arena, shifting priorities and issue areas while rotating advisers and policy staff*".

In light of this challenge, and in order to understand how Trump's rhetorical strategy is shaped and where the public receptiveness to his discourse came from, it becomes crucial to examine it against the backdrop the domestic context that surrounded his election, described by many as an '*American decline*'. This decline is the consequence of the actions of '*corrupt, globalist elites*', that have produced an America that not only couldn't win anymore but that was losing to others. There is widespread consensus on the fact that populist leaders capitalize on the fears of citizens, and in the US those originate from many sources: the consequences of the economic recession, increasing levels of unemployment and social inequality, global challenges like climate change, migration and scarcity of natural resources, security challenges like the one posed by terrorist movements, but also from the backlash against '*progressive cultural change*' and the fear of loss of traditional values. All these elements, framed into a bigger picture of a general '*American decline*', enabled his populist message to take hold and facilitated his rise (Aydin-Düzgit & Keyman, 2017; Biegon, 2019).

Muller's work also sheds light into this phenomenon, as he tried to ascertain which were the conditions that made populism emerge in a particular domestic context. For the author, those are: anti-elitism beyond simple opposition to incumbent parties, anti-pluralism that provides a credible justification for the 'us-them' divide within a certain society, and the appropriate socioeconomic situation with large gaps between the different social strands (Muller, 2016). As we can see in the context of the former

President's election, all the factors above came together in time and place, partially due to Trump's own way of doing politics, and enabled the growth of populism in the country.

1.4.2 Donald Trump and NATO: An unprecedented rivalry

Despite the novelty of Donald Trump's profile, approach to policymaking and adoption of the presidential role, that broke from political tradition in the US and had profound and serious implications in the foreign policy realm, the introductory chapter on transatlantic relations and NATO showed that the history of tensions and criticism to the alliance is as old as the partnership itself. A question that therefore begs to be answered is what made Trump a one-of-a-kind threat, specially to NATO, instead of the natural evolution of an already existing trend.

For one, "*Donald Trump has been the harshest critic of NATO ever to sit in the White House*" (Benítez, 2019, p. 179). The tone of his criticisms was new and much more divisive than the disagreements between any of the presidents that preceded him and US allies. No other president has questioned NATO's key role as a one of the most important contributors to US national security, and while it is undeniable that a larger trend of changing U.S. expectations about the Alliance has come to the surface, Trump undoubtedly breaks from historical presidential support for NATO (Benítez, 2019).

As Benítez (2019, p. 182-183) so adequately highlights:

"Trump is not the first president to complain that NATO allies are not contributing their fair share of defense spending to the Alliance. But Trump has done two things his predecessors avoided. First, he has publicly questioned the value of NATO to U.S. national security. Second, Trump has publicly questioned the validity of U.S. defense commitments to NATO allies. These two deviations from decades of bipartisan presidential support for NATO have weakened the cohesion of the transatlantic alliance and caused fears in allied capitals that under the Trump administration, the U.S. may not help defend them should they face a foreign attack."

It can be argued that there's both continuity and change in US-NATO policy, but Trump's decision to issue all these threats publicly, linking a number of security-related and unrelated concessions to them and his wrong assessment of NATO's ex ante value

are all a departure from the norm (Shiffrinson, 2018). The former President went as far as to call NATO ‘*obsolete*’ and ‘*relic of the Cold War*’, and became the first U.S president in the history of the Alliance to publicly threaten with pulling out of NATO if his European counterparts did not dramatically increase their levels of spending to reach the 2% of GDP threshold, while at the same time describing the organization as ‘*outdated*’ and questioning why the US should continue to protect what he called ‘*free riders*’ (Wright, 2017; MacAskill, 2018; Bağbaşıoğlu, 2021).

On that same line, Trump suggested that the security guarantees enshrined in Article 5, the cornerstone of the organization, were conditional instead of absolute: that is, only applicable to those who meet their financial obligations and honor their commitment to spend 2% of their GDP on defense. The fact that he decided to cast doubts on the sanctity of NATO security guarantees right when Europe faces a deteriorating external security environment constituted a critical juncture in transatlantic relations, one that rendered it more fragile and fragmented than ever (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2019; Petersson, 2018).

Even though it is certainly important to look beyond Trump’s personality and analyze the structural and long-term factors that have led to a change on US policy towards both Europe and NATO (like the decline in America’s power, a greater support for a US grand strategy of isolationism or “*strategic restraint*”, and a focus on other regions of the world like the Asia-Pacific), the fact that the Trump administration reinforced and deepened those trends with its transactional and unilateralist approach to international relations cannot be disregarded (Posen, 2014).

1.5 METHODOLOGY: Deductive-inductive discourse analysis

1.4.1 Defining discourse analysis:

When faced with the methodological question of how to undertake this research project, the discourse analytical approach becomes the best-fitting tool to shed light on the discursive practices of the populist rhetoric, as it provides “*a context sensitive, analytical procedure for examining how populist discourse draws on linguistic tropes and discursive practices as resources within specific socio-cultural contexts*” (Ekström, Patrona, & Thornborrow, 2018, p. 3). Therefore, the need to introduce a formalized definition of discourse emerges, as the first step to operationalize the research methodology generally referred to as discourse analysis.

Even though ‘discourse’ is an undeniably contested term, especially after its proliferation led to divergent meanings that reflect its complex nature, authors like Hall have attempted to grasp its essence: “*It is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e., a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic*” (Hall, 1996, p. 201). Succinctly, discourse is produced through language, and it becomes the way of talking about and acting towards a concept or idea. Anderson and Holloway (2020) also add that discourse in its broadest sense includes not only talk and text but also other concepts such as narratives, sets of beliefs and ways of seeing the world embedded in it.

Once discourse has been defined, it is time to focus the attention on Discourse Analysis (DA) as the chosen method for this research. It has been described as a qualitative research methodology that studies the use of language and the production of meaning in social contexts, providing insights into the way speech and texts help to shape and reproduce social understandings and forms of knowledge. Even though this type of qualitative approach to textual analysis originated from linguistics, it is now located within a larger body of research that includes various disciplines like politics and international relations. All these different approaches to DA share a common understanding of language as both an object of inquiry, and the domain in which people’s knowledge of the social world is actively shaped, a perspective on language that regards it as the one thing that constructs and organizes the terms in which we understand reality (Tonkiss, 2012). For the purpose of this research, discourse analysis is built upon a

constructivist approach, perceiving any form of political order to be embedded in language and articulated by the use of speech acts (Pedersen, 2009).

In light of the above, the reason why a DA approach becomes most suitable for this type of research, the analysis of the rhetoric of populist, right wing political actors, is because it embraces a view of language and language use which suggests that it is not conceived as a neutral instrument for communication but it contains a certain ideological load, and it focuses on the ability of discourse to shape (or reshape) social reality, the ultimate goal of the populist leader (Boréus & Bergström, 2017).

According to many scholars on the field, the communication of right-wing parties tends to include rhetorical and ambivalent discursive strategies and devices such as tropes, allusions, stereotypes, fallacies, allocations, presuppositions, or metaphors, that can only be fully understood using in-depth qualitative techniques like DA (Sengul, 2019). Discourse analysis situates these texts in their social, cultural, political, and historical context, and they are thus interrogated to uncover the unspoken and unstated assumptions implicit within them that have shaped the very form of the text in the first place (Cheek, 2004).

In the field of political research there has been an increased interest in employing discourse-analytical approaches to the study of political communication, in an effort to fully comprehend the new communicative strategies developed by emerging political actors, that make discourse analysis a crucial resource to understand the current political context (Sengul, 2019). There exists precedent to this research in the field of discourse analysis studies, where some authors have focused on analyzing right-wing populist rhetoric and its impact on the current political sphere (E.g. Wodak, Mral & Khosravini, 2013), because of its rising dominance and the use of persuasive strategies to address indiscriminate audiences (Carta & Wodak, 2015). There is also precedent in the field of foreign policy, where scholars like Barbé, Herranz-Surrallés and Natorski (2014) draw on the premises of a constructivist discourse analysis to examine the performative character of language: how discourse constructs subjects and objects, enabling certain paths of action while excluding others. Carta & Wodak (2015, p. 3) highlight how *“discourse analysis can be of great use in illuminating the way in which social discursive practices convey meaning to foreign policy discourses, through both contestation and communicative action”*.

1.4.2 Defining the application of discourse analysis to the research at hand

Considering all of the above, the chosen methodological basis for the following deductive – inductive discourse analysis is the study of tropes, or the discursive devices allowing for understanding recurrent themes in populist rhetoric, as they operationalize and simplify complex phenomena. Trope analysis, then, becomes a tool for mapping and disentangling Donald Trump’s populist foreign policy and more specifically, his views on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

This study draws on two bodies of scholarship – literature on transatlantic relations and the Alliance between the EU and the US, and more recent work on populist foreign policy. This analysis builds on recent research that links critical discourse analysis with populist foreign policy, with the goal to determine if Donald Trump’s populist foreign policy rhetoric affected the U.S. Congress debate on NATO.

Thus, the research question that will guide the following investigation is:

“Did Donald Trump’s populist foreign policy rhetoric impact the congressional discourse on the US Congress’ debates on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)?”

In order to answer it, a two-step analysis will be conducted. The first part of it is concerned with Donald Trump’s populist discourse on US foreign policy, and more specifically, his views on NATO. To understand them, a sample of 10 public appearances is examined, covering the period 2016-2021 (which includes both his presidential campaign and his 4-year mandate in the White House as the 46th president of the US). The sample includes 4 TV and newspaper interviews with media outlets, 3 speeches at NATO Summits and Conferences and 3 campaign rallies.

This sampling procedure aligns with the principles of what Yin described as ‘purposive sampling’, that represent those sources of data that “*yield the most relevant and plentiful data, given your topic of study*” (Yin, 2011). As DA research privileges in-depth analysis of a reduced number of texts, only to allow a more comprehensive treatment of the material and the research phenomenon at hand, this sample size is consistent with this principle. For the purposes of this specific research, the former president’s appearances were selected because of their significance in portraying his views on NATO.

MEDIA OUTLET	FORMAT	DATE	INTERVIEW TITLE	INTERVIEWER	TRUMP'S STATUS
CNN	Live (TV show)	21/3/16	The Final Five: Interview with Donald Trump	Wolf Blitzer	Republican presidential candidate
CNN	Live (TV show)	29/3/16	Donald Trump, CNN Milwaukee Republican Presidential Town Hall	Anderson Cooper	Republican presidential candidate
The New York Times	Written (Newspaper)	21/7/16	Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey's coup attempt and the world	David E. Sanger & Maggie Haberman	Republican presidential candidate
The Times	Written (Newspaper)	16/1/17	Full transcript of interview with Donald Trump	Michael Gove & Kai Diekmann	President-elect

Table 1. Sample of Donald Trump's interviews.

TYPE OF STATEMENT	LOCATION	DATE	STATEMENT TITLE	TRUMP'S STATUS
Remarks	NATO HQ (Brussels, Belgium)	25/5/17	Remarks by President Trump at NATO Unveiling of the Article 5 and Berlin Wall Memorials	President
Remarks	Chief of Mission Residente (Brussels, Belgium)	11/7/18	Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at Bilateral Breakfast	President
Press conference	NATO HQ (Brussels, Belgium)	12/7/18	Remarks by President Trump at press conference after 2018 NATO summit in Brussels	President

Table 2. Sample of Donald Trump's NATO summit speeches

TYPE OF STATEMENT	LOCATION	DATE	STATEMENT TITLE	TRUMP'S STATUS
Political rally	Scranton, Pennsylvania, US	27/7/16	Donald Trump in Scranton, PA	Republican presidential candidate
Political rally	Pensacola, Florida, US	8/12/17	Donald Trump Holds a Political Rally in Pensacola, Florida	President
Political rally	Great Falls, Montana, US	5/7/18	Donald Trump Holds a Political Rally in Great Falls, Montana	President

Table 3. Sample of Donald Trump's political rallies

A deductive analysis of the texts and transcriptions is then conducted to extract 6 main tropes from them, those who represent the most important arguments of the application of his populist foreign policy to NATO, with which a codebook will be created. First, the tropes will be conceptualized and explained, and then operationalized with associated key words in order to apply the codebook to the next part of the analysis.

TROPE	SUGGESTED KEYWORDS
<i>Burden-sharing</i>	Burden, fair-share, two percent, GDP
<i>Financial demands</i>	Expense, cost, pay, financial, contribution, obligation, owe, bills, money, step up, reimburse, commitment
<i>Unfair treatment</i>	Unfair, unfairly, fairness, inappropriate, take advantage, free rider, one way
<i>Obsolescence</i>	Obsolete, relic, outdated
<i>Threat of pulling out of NATO</i>	Withdraw, exit, leave, pull out, abandon
<i>Conditionality of Article 5</i>	Condition, if

Table 4. NATO tropes and suggested keywords.

The codebook that has been created for this research is a methodological device adapted to the study of debates on NATO, that analyzes the appearance of Trump’s tropes on the organization in the Congressional debates and hearings through the spotting of keywords, and that looks at variables like chamber majority, party affiliation, identity of the speaker, state that they come from, time in office, etc.

TROPE	KEYWORD	STATEMENT	DATE	CONGRESS	CHAMBER MAJORITY	SPEAKER	PARTY AFFILIATION	STATE	GENDER	TIME IN OFFICE
Financial demands	Obligation	And I agree with	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Eliot L. Engel	Democrat	New York	Male	Incumbent

Table 5. Example of the variables included in the codebook applied to the Congressional debates and hearings.

The second part of the two-step analysis, inductive this time, addresses the appearance of these tropes in the US Congress, more specifically in a selection of congressional debates on NATO in both the general meetings of the House of Representatives and the specific hearings of Committee on Foreign Affairs of that same chamber, by applying the aforementioned codebook to them:

DATE	CONGRESS	CHAMBER	COMMITTEE	SERIAL NO.	NAME OF THE HEARING
13/3/19	116th	House of Representatives	Committee on Foreign Affairs	116-13	NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance
26/3/19	116th	House of Representatives	Committee on Foreign Affairs	116-20	The historic American alliance with Europe
2/4/19	116th	House of Representatives	Committee on Foreign Affairs	116-23	The future of NATO: New challenges and opportunities

Table 6. Sample of the Committee on Foreign Affairs’ debates on NATO.

DATE	CONGRESS	CHAMBER	VOL. AND NO.	NAME OF THE STATEMENTS
10/7/18	115th	House of Representatives	164/115	NATO: Belly up to the bar The 2018 NATO Summit
13/7/18	115th	House of Representatives	164/118	Urging NATO allies to honor financial commitments Disparaging NATO allies is not productive Insulting behavior is unbecoming Europe should pay their fair share for NATO
22/1/19	116th	House of Representatives	165/13	NATO Support Act

Table 7. Sample of the House of Representative's debates on NATO.

The explanation for the chosen sample of six debates is the following: The three hearings of the Committee on Foreign Affairs are the only ones during the Donald Trump presidency that have NATO as the main subject to be discussed, while the general meetings of the House of Representatives are those who included any sort of debating on NATO issues.

It should be noted that, even though there exists extensive research in the domains of populist right-wing movements and their discourse, including their impact on US foreign policy and the role of Donald Trump himself as a president (like that of Biegón (2019), that applies DA to examine the role of populism in Donald Trump's foreign policy through the analysis of his rhetoric during his presidential campaign and early tenure in office, or that of Boucher & Thies (2019) that have also examined the power of his populist foreign policy rhetoric in dominating and shaping public discourse on trade), the author of this research has found a shortcoming in the available literature since no academic contributions have been found that examined the resonance of his populist foreign policy discourse on NATO in the debates of the US Congress. This work aims to make a modest empirical contribution to this under-developed literature.

Nonetheless, a critical assessment of the task at hand should not be discarded. The author is aware of the shortages and limitations of the research, due to the constraints on time and resources that a master's level thesis has associated to it, but also due to the fact that there is little precedent in studying the topic at hand. Therefore, this research can be considered exploratory, as a way to examine the limits for future researchers on the matter.

2. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

2.1 An analysis of Trump's statements: Categorizing his key arguments

The following section will attempt to disentangle and identify the key arguments in Donald Trump's populist foreign policy discourse on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, through the analysis of a sample of 10 public appearances, which includes 4 TV and newspaper interviews with media outlets, 3 speeches at NATO Summits and Conferences and 3 campaign rallies. The analysis has therefore identified six recurrent themes: Burden-sharing, financial demands, unfair treatment, obsolescence, threat of pulling out of NATO and conditionality of Article 5.

This chapter will proceed to explain each of them as they appear on the sample of documents. In order to simplify the citation process, a chart with specific references has been created to identify in which of the ten public appearances the argument appears on (Said chart can be found in the Annex).

1. Burden-sharing:

One of the most repeated complaints made by Donald Trump is concerned with burden-sharing, or more precisely, the lack of. The cost of membership to the organization requires a financial contribution to the funding of NATO's defense expenditures, but also a deployable and sustainable military contribution to NATO's expeditionary operations. Focusing just on the financial side, the requirements are set at a 2% of GDP spent on defense expenditure and a 20% of overall defense expenditure destined to major equipment and Research & Development (Hartley & Sandler, 1999; Zannella, 2020, Mattelaer, 2016).

According to Trump, the financial requirements are not being met by many of the members of the organization: "*I have been very, very direct with Secretary Stoltenberg and members of the Alliance in saying that NATO members must finally contribute their fair share and meet their financial obligations, for 23 of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they're supposed to be paying for their defense*" (Trump_statement_2017_2). Trump's "*oft-intoned conviction that NATO's European members flagrantly shirk their financial obligations to the alliance*" (Colla, 2019, para. 3) has become one of his most cherished narratives when referring to NATO's

flaws, in a seemingly deliberate plot to cast doubts upon the organization's convenience for the U.S.

His belligerent stance against NATO members for their insufficient contribution to the organization's defense efforts included complaints of *'free riding'* and demands for them to live up to their obligations and commitments. During the Milwaukee Republican Presidential Town Hall he stated, *"We're paying too much! You have countries in NATO, I think it's 28 countries – you have countries in NATO that are getting a free ride and it's unfair, it's very unfair"* (Trump_statement_2016_2).

Notably, the target of most of the criticism has been Germany. As he proclaimed in his rally in Great Falls, Montana: *"So we pay 4 percent of a huge GDP, which got a lot bigger since I became your president. And Germany - Germany which is the biggest country of the E.U., European Union, Germany pays 1 percent. One percent. And I said, you know, Angela, I can't guarantee it, but we're protecting you, and it means a lot more to you than protecting us because I don't know how much protection we get by protecting you"* (Trump_statement_2018_1). In his speech, he even hinted that the US' involvement in NATO was more important for the European allies than for the US itself, questioning the importance of the benefits the country gets being part of an organization that guarantees peace and stability in Europe. On top of that, at a bilateral breakfast during a NATO summit he went as far as to say that the difference between the contributions of Germany and the US was *"inappropriate"* (Trump_statement_2018_2).

Even though some of his claims are backed by figures and evidence, many times they are not. In a rally in Scranton, Pennsylvania, he stated that *"(...) five countries out of 28 are paying their way. The rest of them aren't. Some are paying nothing. Because there's nobody to ask them. There's nobody to ask them. So we're not going to be the stupid country anymore"* (Trump_statement_2016_4). The allegation that some countries are paying nothing is completely unfounded, but it allowed Trump to rail against the other member states and to frame the US as the country who is being taken advantage of, in an unfair agreement where the Americans bear most of the cost. As he constantly repeats, *"Frankly, we were carrying too much of a burden"* (Trump_statement_2018_3).

2. Financial demands:

Following a similar line of arguments as with the burden-sharing concerns, and under President Trump's transactional approach to foreign policy, many of his sharpest

comments are related to financial demands towards the rest of the member states, since apparently, all revolves around money for him. When asked in a CNN interview whether the United States needs to rethink its involvement in NATO, his answer was definitive: *“Yes, because it's costing us too much money. And frankly they have to put up more money. They're going to have to put some up also.”* (Trump_statement_2016_1)

On that same interview, and while he sent mixed signals about wanting to diminish the US's presence in NATO or ending it altogether (*“We're the ones taking the brunt of it. So I think we have to reconsider keep NATO, but maybe we have to pay a lot less toward the NATO itself”*; *“Not decrease its role but certainly decrease the kind of spending. We are spending a tremendous amount in NATO and other people proportionately less. No good”*, (Trump_statement_2017_1)), he maintained his intention to reduce the funding allocated towards the organization, pointing at those who were contributing less.

Trump insists on his remarks that the US is *“paying disproportionately”*, *“too much”*, *“tremendous”* and *“astronomical”* amounts, with no real benefit to them (*“we're protecting everybody, and yet we're paying a lot of money to protect”* (Trump_statement_2018_3)). On a rally held in Pensacola, he used the financial demands to insult NATO allies by calling them *“delinquent”*, and he even linked these demands to a threat of pulling out of the alliance (another of the recurrent themes that will be explored further on): *“Because I told the people of NATO standing right behind me, while they were standing behind me, they've been delinquent, they haven't been paying. I said you gotta pay, you gotta pay, you gotta pay. And now they've taken in, because of that -- and I guess I applied if you don't pay we're out of there, right”* (Trump_statement_2017_3).

His sort of mantra, *“you've got to pay”* (Trump_statement_2016_1), that he repeats over and over, presents the United States as a sponsor that is sick and tired of picking up the slack for others: *“I'll see NATO and I'm going to tell NATO -- you got to start paying your bills. The United States is not going to take care of everything. We're paying for anywhere from 70 to 90 percent to protect Europe”* (Trump_statement_2016_4). Again, the phrasing of the sentence (*“to protect Europe”*) suggests that there is no actual advantage for the US, something he repeats time and time again: *“Now I can only tell you one thing: it helps them a hell of a lot more than it helps us, okay?”* (Trump_statement_2016_3).

Trump also uses a specific discursive technique that consists in framing the financial commitments of the NATO member states as a debt towards the United States,

as if it's something they owe them for underspending and neglecting their obligations: *"And many countries are not paying what they should. And, frankly, many countries owe us a tremendous amount of money for many years back, where they're delinquent, as far as I'm concerned, because the United States has had to pay for them (...) It's massive amounts of money is owed"* (Trump_statement_2018_3).

3. Unfair treatment:

A term that has emerged in Trump's narrative about NATO is the adjective *'unfair'*, along with associated concepts that revolve around it: fair share, fairness, unfairness. According to the former President, the United States are getting a bad deal out of NATO and being treated unjustly: *"I have to bring it up, because I think it's very unfair to our country. It's very unfair to our taxpayer. And I think that these countries have to step it up not over a 10-year period; they have to step it up immediately. Germany is a rich country. They talk about they're going to increase it a tiny bit by 2030. Well, they could increase it immediately tomorrow and have no problem. I don't think it's fair to the United States. So we're going to have to do something because we're not going to put up with it. We can't put up with it. And it's inappropriate"* (Trump_statement_2018_3). His view on NATO can be summed up in the following statement: *"It's an unfair burden on the United States"* (Trump_statement_2018_3).

In his rhetoric, he mentions the American taxpayer being taken advantage of, using derogatory terms to stir up emotions: *"We are the schmucks that are paying for the whole thing"*⁵. He also states that the US has been disrespected, and vows to become the one who is going to fix it: *"It's terrible, the way our country has been disrespected. But we will be disrespected no longer, okay?"* (Trump_statement_2016_3). He presents himself as some sort of Messiah, hinting at disguised threats to establish a strongman image, one on a quest to restore the long-lost glory of the United States of America.

The *'unfairness'* claims also tap into the notion of NATO only being useful or advantageous for the European allies, not for the US: *"I just want fairness for the United States. We're paying for far too much of NATO. NATO is very important. But NATO is helping Europe more than it's helping us"* (Trump_statement_2017_3). When a journalist pointed out during the Milwaukee Republican Presidential Town Hall that there is benefit for the United States in having a secure Europe, Trump's response dismissed its importance compared to the economic drain it meant for the US: *"There's a benefit,*

but not big enough to bankrupt and destroy the United States, because that's what's happening. We can't afford it. It's very simple" (Trump_statement_2016_2).

4. Obsolescence:

One of the most controversial and incendiary statements to ever come out of Donald Trump's mouth, despite the difficulty of choosing just one, is the claim that he made about NATO being 'obsolete'. He first mentioned it in an interview with The Times: *"I said a long time ago — that NATO had problems. Number one it was obsolete, because it was, you know, designed many, many years ago. (...) It's obsolete because it wasn't taking care of terror"* (Trump_statement_2017_1). According to the former president, the first reason why it was obsolete was the change in paradigm after the end of the Cold War: *"Let me tell you, NATO is obsolete. It was 67 years, or it's over 60 years old. It is — many countries, doesn't cover terrorism, okay? It covers the Soviet Union which is no longer in existence. And NATO has to either be rejiggered, changed for the better", "And frankly it's a different world than it was when we originally conceived of the idea"* (Trump_statement_2017_1), an argument he uses to claim that the US can't afford to maintain the same level of involvement: *"We can't afford to do all of this anymore to the same extent. That was a different time, that was a different age"* (Trump_statement_2017_1).

As it could be expected, his remarks sent shock waves to his European counterparts, creating a feeling of dismay and concern since his rhetoric on the alliance seemed to only become more and more divisive and harmful for its stability and credibility. Trump addressed the backlash he received for his comments on a political rally that took place soon after in Scranton, Pennsylvania: *"Then I said the second thing so I said, it's obsolete. I also said because I heard this, that people aren't paying their fair share, they're not paying their way. And then these stupid people, they say, but we have a treaty. They said. Well they said, we have a treaty. So I want them to pay. And here's the story: they will pay if asked by the right person. They'll pay. They'll pay. And Hillary Clinton said, we will protect our allies at all costs. Well, we need money"* (Trump_statement_2016_4). In his speech he went so far as to insult the other member states by calling them *"stupid people"*, and insist on the idea that he is the right person that will force them to pay what, according to him, they owe to NATO.

5. Threat of pulling out of NATO:

Even though the former President has been elusive and ambiguous about his suggested threats to make the United States withdraw from NATO, due to the seriousness that implies even insinuating it, there have been multiple reports of him making such an allegation behind closed doors and hinting it in public appearances. For example, in the rally that took place in Pensacola, Florida (in a statement that has been mentioned in a previous section), he finished one of the points he made by saying: *“Because I told the people of NATO standing right behind me, while they were standing behind me, they've been delinquent, they haven't been paying. I said you gotta pay, you gotta pay, you gotta pay. And now they've taken in, because of that -- and I guess I applied if you don't pay we're out of there, right”* (Trump_statement_2017_3). His words, *“if you don't pay we're out of there”* clearly suggest that the United States would be ready to leave the Alliance, a completely unthinkable statement coming out of a President's mouth.

In an interview with The New York Times back when he was still the Republican presidential nominee, he discussed his views on foreign policy and he addressed his comments by trying to justify why he would ever defend a US withdrawal from NATO: *“I would prefer that we be able to continue, but if we are not going to be reasonably reimbursed for the tremendous cost of protecting these massive nations with tremendous wealth (...). We're talking about countries that are doing very well. Then yes, I would be absolutely prepared to tell those countries, “Congratulations, you will be defending yourself”* (Trump_statement_2016_3). It falls once more under the transactional, zero-sum game view of international relations, in which the US is being taken advantage of by wealthy nations that require their protection without giving anything back.

According to him, the fact that such nations would never think that America would leave the Alliance gives them the leverage to not contribute financially: *“In a deal, you always have to be prepared to walk. Hillary Clinton has said, “We will never, ever walk.” That's a wonderful phrase, but unfortunately, if I were on Saudi Arabia's side, Germany, Japan, South Korea and others, I would say, “Oh, they're never leaving, so what do we have to pay them for?”* (Trump_statement_2016_3). He even went as far as to suggest alternative solutions to a scenario in which the US would feel threatened and didn't have to backing up of NATO: *“If we ever felt there was a reason to defend the United States, we can always deploy, and it would be a lot less expense...”* (Trump_statement_2016_3).

Again, the main motivation behind it is economic, and it makes completely unrealistic and fictional claims without any evidence to support them.

It is important to note that Trump avoids using direct language in public when referring to his threats to disengage America from NATO (expressions such as withdraw, pull out, exit, leave, abandon), but instead chooses to use other vague and ambiguous terms, especially in official appearances like a NATO Summit. For example, in his interview with The New York Times he said: *“We need other people to reimburse us much more substantially than they are giving right now because we are only paying for a fraction of the cost (...) Or, if we cannot make the right deal, to take on the burden themselves”* (Trump_statement_2016_3). In this case he opts to use the expression *“take on the burden themselves”* to hint that the rest of the member states would have to take care of their own defense in case he doesn’t think the deal the US is getting out of NATO is ‘fair’.

In some other of his contributions, he didn’t explicitly mention withdrawing from NATO but he tapped into the idea of the US stepping back from its role as the leader of the liberal international order, which also implies rethinking the Alliance: *“The United States cannot afford to be the policemen of the world anymore, folks. We have to rebuild our own country. We have to stop with this stuff (...) You don’t have many of the countries in NATO talking about — it’s always us. We’re always the first one out. We have very big problems in our country. Very, very big problems. NATO has to be either changed, or we have to do something”* (Trump_statement_2016_2).

Another one of the most concerning statements he made happened during a press conference during the 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels, where he was asked by a journalist if he believed that he could carry out his threat to potentially pull the United States out of NATO without the Congress’ explicit support and approval. Even though Trump then said that it was unnecessary to withdraw, his first words were *“I think I probably can”* (Trump_statement_2018_3).

6. Conditionality of Article 5:

Last but not least, and perhaps what became one of his most dangerous insinuations, many have noted the way that Donald Trump repeatedly stated that the security guarantees enshrined in Article 5, the cornerstone of the organization, were conditional instead of absolute. The condition under which the US would provide the

military aid they are bound to because of their NATO membership to any other member state would be if they met their financial obligations (that is, honor their commitment to spend 2% of their GDP on defense).

On his New York Times interview, White House and national security correspondent David E. Sanger posed the question *“I was just in the Baltic States. They are very concerned obviously about this new Russian activism (...). If Russia came over the border into Estonia or Latvia, Lithuania, places that Americans don’t think about all that often, would you come to their immediate military aid?”* (Trump_statement_2016_3). Trump’s response dodged the question and diverted the attention to the financial debt of NATO members, by saying *“We have many NATO members that aren’t paying their bills”* (Trump_statement_2016_3). Sanger then decided to tell him to forget the bills and remind him of the fact that the US is treaty-obligated under NATO to provide such military aid, pushing the question forward once more: *“My point here is, can the members of NATO, including the new members in the Baltics, count on the United States to come to their military aid if they were attacked by Russia? And count on us fulfilling our obligations...”* (Trump_statement_2016_3). Trump’s response was something many never thought they would hear from a Presidential candidate: *“Have they fulfilled their obligations to us? If they fulfill their obligations to us, the answer is yes”* (Trump_statement_2016_3). The second journalist in the room, Maggie Haberman, pushed once more: *“And if not?”*. Trump again decided to be elusive, but nonetheless reaffirming his main argument: *“Well, I’m not saying if not. I’m saying, right now there are many countries that have not fulfilled their obligations to us”* (Trump_statement_2016_3).

The fact that he decided to cast doubts on the sanctity of NATO security guarantees by including the word *“if”*, clearly indicating a conditionality in the collective defense principle enshrined in Article 5, created not only a sense of unease and uncertainty among the members of the Alliance, but also raised questions in the international arena about the credibility of NATO.

Additional aspects of Trump’s rhetoric:

To fully comprehend Trump's narrative and discursive style, it becomes crucial to take into account a couple of added aspects that shed some light on the way he communicates his policy making. One of the most important ones is the volatility of his rhetoric, or the habit that he developed of backtracking or reversing on any statement he made in the past, which only adds unpredictability and mistrust to his figure. After his alleged claims about NATO being obsolete and a relic of the Cold War, the remarks he made during the press conference at the 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels told a completely different story: "*I believe in NATO. I think NATO is a very important — probably the greatest ever done. (...) We'll see what happens, but I can tell you that NATO now is really a fine-tuned machine*" (Trump_statement_2018_3). One of the reporters that attended the press conference took the chance to point out the concerns about his more often than not changes of heart when he asked: "*We understand your message, but some people ask themselves, will you be tweeting differently once you board the Air Force One?*" (Trump_statement_2018_3), to which Trump replied "*No, that's other people that do that. I don't. I'm very consistent. I'm a very stable genius*" (Trump_statement_2018_3).

Another aspect that marks a clear divergence from traditional presidential discourse is the tone of his remarks, characterized as clearly not the official formal and respectful register expected from a President but unique brand of oratory that includes unapologetic criticism and insults of opponents, departures from the theme, constant repetition and exaggeration and a bluntness that has shocked many. As an example, in the political rally that took place in Pensacola he dared to call the attendants of the previous year NATO Summit "*fake people*" (Trump_statement_2017_3), in the Milwaukee Republican Presidential Town Hall he called Brussels a "*hell hole*" (Trump_statement_2016_2), and in his rally in Great Falls he said about the EU that "*They kill us with NATO. They kill us*" (Trump_statement_2018_1). And not only that, but Trump also referred to some of the NATO member states as "*countries that most of the people in this room have never even heard of*" (Trump_statement_2016_4). His use of social media as an unmediated platform also provides him with the opportunity to send blunt and straight-forward messages, something that was picked up by Philip Rucker from the Washington Post when he reminded Trump that he had tweeted "*What good is NATO?*" (Trump_statement_2018_3) during the 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels.

Concerns about the damage his rhetoric inflicts on the relationships with other international players and on the credibility of US foreign policy had already been raised

by reporters after some of his comments, for example during the aforementioned press conference at the 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels. The White House correspondent for PBS said during the round of questions: *“Do you think that your rhetoric helps NATO cohesion, or are you worried that people might think that U.S. might not be as committed to NATO? There are a lot of people who say they were worried and stressed by what you did yesterday”* (Trump_statement_2018_3), and Jeremy Diamond from CNN added: *“Do you feel like given the threats that you made about potentially leaving NATO, about insulting Germany’s sovereignty, it appears, by suggesting that they’re totally controlled by Russia — do you feel like that’s an effective way to conduct diplomacy?”* (Trump_statement_2018_3). A reporter from Finland even suggested that Trump’s hard take on diplomacy put him closer to Putin than to a European ally: *“And don’t you think that your hard diplomacy — that you are playing to the same goal that Putin, with your hard diplomacy towards EU and NATO?”* (Trump_statement_2018_3).

The end goal of his discourse strategy can be understood when looking at the response he gave to Maggie Haberman during his New York Times interview, in which she asked him what the motto “America First” meant for him. In Trump’s words, that *“We are going to take care of this country first before we worry about everybody else in the world”* (Trump_statement_2016_3).

2.2 Analyzing the impact of Trump’s rhetoric on Congress’ debates

After identifying and describing the six recurrent themes present in Trump's narrative on NATO (Burden-sharing, financial demands, unfair treatment, obsolescence, threat of pulling out of NATO and conditionality of Article 5), the second part of the analysis will focus on discerning whether those arguments, as a reflection of the President's populist foreign policy, caused a discursive shift in the Congress' debates.

2.2.1 Debates on the House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs:

NATO AT 70: AN INDISPENSABLE ALLIANCE

On March 13th, 2019, a hearing before the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives of the US Congress took place to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The opening statement of Eliot Engel, chairman of the committee and member of the Democratic party, already alluded to President Trump's rhetoric about the alliance: *"Since before he even came into office, President Trump has taken opportunities to denigrate our allies and undermine NATO in his personal dealings with European leaders, his policy proposals, and rhetoric. (...) President Trump often depicts the NATO partnership as some kind of one-way street where the United States bears inordinate cost with little benefit, and that is just not true"* (NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance, 2019). His opening remarks become important because they draw attention to the damaging effect of Trump's narrative on the alliance even before the discussion starts, evidencing that it is already a well-known problem.

The analysis of the full transcript of the session (*Figure 8*) shows that Trump's six main arguments about NATO appear a total of 26 times, 9 pronounced by Democrat representatives and 17 by members of the President's Republican party (almost double the number of times). The most recurrent topic is burden-sharing, appearing a total of 8 times, followed closely by financial demands and unfair treatment with 7 mentions each. Obsolescence is mentioned just two times, both by Republicans, while the threat of pulling out of NATO is mentioned a single time. It is interesting to note that the only time the conditionality of article 5 is vaguely suggested, it comes from a Democrat representative.

TROPE	KEYWORD	STATEMENT	DATE	CONGRESS	CHAMBER MAJORITY	SPEAKER	PARTY AFFILIATION	STATE	GENDER	TIME IN OFFICE
Financial demands	Obligation	And I agree with President Trump when he said that they should fulfill that obligation. We should hold them to that obligation.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Eliot L. Engel	Democrat	New York	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Obligation	We need to explore the role that NATO plays in America's foreign policy and discuss ways we can improve the organization, including efforts to make sure our allies follow through on all their obligations.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Eliot L. Engel	Democrat	New York	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent, GDP, live up	Our friends must also be honest with each other. Some of our allies have not been living up to the decision at the Wales Summit in 2014 to spend 2 percent of their GDP on national defense.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Michael McCaul	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent, GDP	We had a bilateral with the Germans with members of the Bundestag as well as other people in their defense establishment there last July, and I came away profoundly disturbed by their unwillingness and inability to meet that 2 percent GDP target.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Chris Smith	Republican	New Jersey	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Percent	I mean 1.24 percent is weak and it is, in my opinion, indefensible.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Chris Smith	Republican	New Jersey	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Step up	And the only thing I will say also in regards to Germany, I understand that they need to step up.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Gregory Meeks	Democrat	New York	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment	Adequate	Now how can you lie to the American people to tell them what Europe is doing is adequate?	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Brad Sherman	Democrat	California	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent	It undercuts our efforts to get Europe to do more because they say, well, you know, if we hit 2 percent, you guys are three and a half percent, we are in the ballpark.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Brad Sherman	Democrat	California	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment		But it seems like the Europeans are focusing on whether they are meeting Washington standards and not whether they are meeting the American people's standard.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Brad Sherman	Democrat	California	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment	Used, abused	And the American taxpayer, they understand that as well. They do not mind making the investment, but they do not want to be used and abused to defend Europe wholly and completely from here.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Scott Perry	Republican	Pennsylvania	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment		Will our NATO partners and allies be upset and be critical of the United States if we reduce our contribution lower than 2 percent saying, well, look, we do a whole lot of other things as well and we do not want to only be measured by this 2 percent because we do a whole lot of other things as well that are not included in the 2 percent. Is that going to be fair?	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Scott Perry	Republican	Pennsylvania	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment	Fair	But it cannot be a one-way street. It cannot be a one-way street. The American taxpayer realizes—Respects the investment.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Scott Perry	Republican	Pennsylvania	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment	One-way	But we demand our NATO partners and allies meet their obligations as well.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Scott Perry	Republican	Pennsylvania	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Obligation	Listening to my colleagues' line of questioning and I think in a bipartisan way we would like our NATO allies to step up and carry more of the burden.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Scott Perry	Republican	Pennsylvania	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Burden	I think Congress can overlay our hand sometimes too in consistently saying that you know, we are going to affirm NATO no matter what, regardless of their percent of GDP they are spending, as an example.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Scott Perry	Republican	Pennsylvania	Male	Incumbent
Conditionality of Article 5		So, Ms. Flournoy, you had mentioned about this 2 percent metric and that it might not make a lot of sense, so I agree that clearly our NATO allies ought to do more.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Ami Bera	Democrat	California	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent	But if you have a partner in a treaty that is year after year, decade after decade not being a good partner in that treaty, then that is an answer why you walk from that treaty. And I think that is the answer that President Trump came to as well.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Ted Lieu	Democrat	California	Male	Incumbent
Threat of pulling out of NATO	Walk from that treaty	So I believe that NATO in order to enable itself for the future, they should shake themselves down to the core. They need to shake off the rust.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Brian Mast	Republican	Florida	Male	Incumbent
Obsolence	Shake off the rust	So when do we get other people to pay and, you know, pay up?	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Brian Mast	Republican	Florida	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Pay, pay up	President Bush said that the people are taking advantage of us or free-riding.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Ted Yoho	Republican	Florida	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment	Take advantage, free-riding	But things are changing. (...) And so things get stale after a while and they have to be updated.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Ted Yoho	Republican	Florida	Male	Incumbent
Obsolence	Stale, updated	And if they know we have been ineffective that members are kind of stale, yes, we are in this NATO thing but we do not really have to pay, it just shows weakness.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Ted Yoho	Republican	Florida	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Pay	And the end result is the General now, Stoltenberg, also said that President Trump is helping us adapt the alliance and has made these people pay up. So I think the results are good.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Ted Yoho	Republican	Florida	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Pay up	Well, you go back to the criticism of NATO burden sharing have been articulated by both Republican and Democratic Presidents, and you go on and it says—I think you wrote this.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Ted Yoho	Republican	Florida	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Burden-sharing	It said President Obama called a number of American allies free riders toward the end of the administration and also Secretary Robert Gates did a hard line against NATO's inability to share more of the burden during the farewell speech. The blunt reality is there has been a dwindling appetite patience, and it goes on.	13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Ted Yoho	Republican	Florida	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing / Unfair treatment	Freeriders, burden		13/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Ted Yoho	Republican	Florida	Male	Incumbent

Table 8. Analysis of "NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance", March 13, 2019.

When looking at the entire text, the descriptive statistics become more nuanced. For example, even though all of Trump's six main arguments come up in the discussion from members of both sides of the political spectrum, the arguments supporting NATO are much more frequent and vehement. The criticism expressed by the members of the Democratic party tends to be much more subtle and gentle and it always comes accompanied by a strong declaration of support for NATO, while the Republicans tend to be a bit harsher but also in most the occasions acknowledging the value of NATO for the US. For example, the ranking member of the Committee, Republican Michael McCaul from Texas, defended NATO and the sanctity of Article 5: *"This collective defense agreement and acknowledgment that an attack on one is an attack on all is a cornerstone of the alliance and we must keep it that way. NATO has enhanced our military capability, increased our intelligence collection, and created a bulwark against international terror. It is critical to our national security and solidifies our friendships with member States"* (NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance, 2019).

The fact that the theme that comes up more frequently is burden-sharing, perhaps the least controversial and divisive of all, shows that most of the members of Congress have not taken such an extreme position as Trump when it comes to reviewing the behavior of the Allies in NATO, and just call for a fairer division of the cost of membership. As Democrat Ami Bera of California puts it, *"Listening to my colleagues' line of questioning and I think in a bipartisan way we would like our NATO allies to step up and carry more of the burden"* (NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance, 2019).

And even when some of the Committee members repeat any of Trump's arguments, merely looking at the language the use compared to the one of the President shows that there is a difference in their stance. For example, in Christ Smith's statement we can see that the tone is much more polite and formal, while still expressing frustration, *"We had a bilateral with the Germans (...) last July, and I came away profoundly disturbed by their unwillingness and inability to meet that 2 percent GDP target"* (NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance, 2019).

Nonetheless, some of the language Donald Trump uses did make it to the chamber, like a reference to the American taxpayer being *"used and abuse to defend Europe"* or the claim that NATO's membership *"cannot be a one-way street"* made by Republican congressman Scott Perry, or the way Republican Ted Yoho asked *"So when do we get other people to pay and, you know, pony up?"*. He also used derogatory expressions like addressing the Alliance as *"this NATO thing"*. But what is really concerning is the fact

that one of the congressmen repeated Trump's threats to pull out of the alliance, in this case Republican Brian Mast of Florida: *"But if you have a partner in a treaty that is year after year, decade after decade not being a good partner in that treaty, then that is an answer why you walk from that treaty. And I think that is the answer that President Trump came to as well"* (NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance, 2019).

The only praise Trump's strategy received came from two representatives of his own party. According to Ted Yoho of Florida, the president's rhetoric, however inappropriate at times, turned out to be effective in the long run: *"So the rhetoric that he spoke, whether you liked his tactic or not, the results I think we are all in agreement was pretty effective. And, you know, people are not used to that kind of rhetoric, you know, we could say things better maybe. And I am thankful this President had the backbone. You know and he will admit, I am not your typical politician, but he is looking for the results and I think we should applaud the results that he is getting to get people to come forward because it makes us all collectively stronger"*. He had to be reminded by one of the witnesses in the hearing, Michele Flournoy, that even though the burden-sharing results could be somewhat celebrated, *"the other result has been this sort of existential doubt that has been created on the part in the minds of our allies about whether they can count on the U.S. That is also a result of the same rhetoric. So there has been positive, but there has also been a negative and we need to take account of that as well"* (NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance, 2019).

After reviewing the occasions in which Trump's arguments made it to the Congress members' rhetoric, it now becomes crucial to look at the bigger picture and analyze the rest of the statements the Congress members made during the meeting to understand their general position on the topic. Many of the members of the Republican party, whose stance on NATO should be more closely aligned to that of the President, took the chance to manifest their trust in the unwavering bipartisan support for the alliance, like Chris Smith of New Jersey: *"Let me say unequivocally, I believe the value of NATO is absolute or as near absolute as it gets to mitigate war, to deter, and when there is a problem to act decisively as a team to thwart any potential adversary. (...) I think there is a lot of hyperbole about NATO's continuance being thrown about. I do not think it is at risk at all. I have been in Congress for 39 years. There is bipartisan support for it"* (NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance, 2019).

On that same note, many Democrats highlighted the dangers of Trump's rhetoric to the transatlantic partnership, like Ami Bera from California (*"I do think many of us are*

uncomfortable and disagree with the premise that we should pull out of NATO and even that rhetoric, I think, is very dangerous and sends the wrong signal to our friends and allies”), Gregory Meeks from New York (“*And prior to this administration, it would have been unimaginable to question the value of our NATO alliance and pass resolutions prohibiting the President from pulling out of this strategic partnership of which he has threatened to do (...). Today, we are here in agreement on the importance of NATO, a point that I think our President disregards”*) or Ted Lieu from California (“*I want to talk about a real emergency right now which is the destabilization of NATO by Donald J. Trump and his enablers”*). Lieu also warned about the catastrophic effects that a US withdrawal from NATO would have on American national security, as well as the hypothetical case of the US not abiding by Article 5. With a slight hint of irony in his words he quoted the national security strategy of the Trump administration: “*The NATO alliance of free and sovereign States is one of our greater advantages over our competitors and the United States remains committed to Article 5 of the Washington treaty’*. I hope the President reads his own national security strategy.” (NATO at 70: An indispensable alliance, 2019).

The general tone of the meeting can be summarized in Eliot Engel’s words, the chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, when he stated: “*The conversation should be more than only financial burden sharing. Instead, we need to see the big picture of how our allies contribute to our collective goals. But the President’s constant denigration of our allies presents a real threat to our foreign policy and national security objectives and, frankly, it is just baffling. President Trump is much more critical of our European allies, societies that share our commitment to core values, than he is of brutal dictators such as North Korea’s Kim Jong-un or Russia’s Vladimir Putin, and that is why it is so important that we in Congress take a leadership role on this front.*”

THE HISTORIC AMERICAN ALLIANCE WITH EUROPE:

A little over a week later, on March 26th, 2019, another hearing before the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives of the US Congress took place, this time to discuss “The historic American alliance with Europe”, in front of the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy and the Environment. Contrary to the previous one, the theme of this debate did not exclusively deal with NATO, but the organization

still became one of the hot topics in the session due to its crucial importance to understand the US' relationship with Europe.

The analysis of the full transcript of the session (*Figure 9*) shows that out of Trump's six main arguments about NATO, only three of them appear a total of 10 times, 9 pronounced by Republican congressmen and just once by a member of the Democratic Party. Those three arguments are financial demands, becoming the most recurrent topic with 4 mentions (with the only Democratic statement among them), followed by a tie between unfair treatment and burden-sharing, with three mentions each.

It can be noted that this time, Trump's arguments about NATO do not show up as many times during the debate, and that most of them are related to the least controversial aspects of his criticism towards the alliance (financial demands and burden-sharing). And once again, most of the criticism comes hand in hand with a praise for the importance of the organization and the unwavering commitment of the US towards it, even from Republican representatives, that go as far as contradict Trump's statements: As Ranking member Kinzinger declared, "*I think it is important to note that we get as much out of NATO as NATO gets out of us. (...). This is not just a United States doing a favor for Europe situation*". Nonetheless, he also deviates the blame from Trump's rhetoric: "*Sometimes Europe and NATO do not like being called out when they are not doing what they need to do*" (The historic American alliance with Europe, 2019).

The demands and complains that are made towards NATO and the European member states include calls to step up the military and defense spending, to reach the 2% GDP target and to meet their financial obligations, and even include an instance when Republican ranking member Kinzinger defended Trump's disparaging rhetoric as his *modus operandi*: "*I do not think there is anything wrong with calling out Europe when they are falling short in those areas*". On the other hand, congressman Jim Costa, the only Democrat that picked up on one of Trump's arguments by agreeing that there are European countries that should do more in terms of their commitment to NATO, at the same time noted that there are "*constructive ways*" to do that, as opposed to the President's insulting narrative (The historic American alliance with Europe, 2019).

It is interesting to see how in this case, some congressmen concurred with Trump on his decision to single out Germany and treat it as his favorite target when blaming NATO members for their lack of commitment to the alliance. For example, Kinzinger's remarks: "*Germany continues to be the member that does the most to stifle NATO growth*" (The historic American alliance with Europe, 2019).

TROPE	KEYWORD	STATEMENT	DATE	CONGRESS	MAJORITY IN THE CHAMBER	SPEAKER	PARTY AFFILIATION	STATE	GENDER	TIME IN OFFICE
Unfair treatment	Not matched	Sometimes it seems like our enthusiasm, however, that we have in the United States for NATO is not always matched in Europe.	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Adam Kinzinger	Republican	Illinois	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Step up (...) spending	I think Europe needs to step up in many cases, whether it is on their military spending, whether it is on a lean-forward attitude, or understanding, in fact, that they are on the front lines and, frankly, have the most to lose of any hostilities between Russia or any hostilities with terror or, frankly, the new cold war with China that is occurring even in Eastern Europe.	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Adam Kinzinger	Republican	Illinois	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Commitment	And I think that some of the comments made here earlier—certainly there are wealthy countries in Europe that should do more in terms of their commitment, Germany being one of them. And we need to continue to push them, as the previous administrations have done.	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	James Manuel Costa	Democrat	California	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment	Falling short	But, that said, the fact that we all kind of have something to play, I do not think there is anything wrong with calling out Europe when they are falling short in those areas.	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Adam Kinzinger	Republican	Illinois	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Step up / Spend money	And we need our friends in NATO to step up with us. We need them to spend a little money with us, too.	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Adam Kinzinger	Republican	Illinois	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent	Germany continues to be the member that does the most to stifle NATO growth. Year-in and year-out, they are near the bottom of defense spending. Why does Germany continue to be such a problem when it comes to defense spending and in reaching the 2 percent GDP target?	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Adam Kinzinger	Republican	Illinois	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent	I want to turn my focus just for a few minutes on NATO spending. And I think there was, during some opening statements made by you, Ms. Wormuth, that, currently, of the 29 NATO countries, eight have met the 2 percent GDP, which is the NATO spending standards that have been set, is that correct?	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Michael Guest	Republican	Mississippi	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment	Paid for	And some information that I saw—and tell me if any of you believe this is accurate or not—but some research said that, in 2017, the U.S. paid for over 70 percent of the combined defense expenditures of NATO.	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Michael Guest	Republican	Mississippi	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Obligation	What can we do, and then, what should we do to make sure that other NATO members are meeting their obligation?	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Michael Guest	Republican	Mississippi	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent	Ms. Wormuth, do you have any suggestion what we can do to get the majority, and ultimately all, of the countries to that 2 percent GDP amount?	26/3/19	116th	Democratic Party	Michael Guest	Republican	Mississippi	Male	Incumbent

Table 9. Analysis of "The historic American alliance with Europe", March 26th, 2019.

TROPE	KEYWORD	STATEMENT	DATE	CONGRESS	MAJORITY IN THE CHAMBER	SPEAKER	PARTY AFFILIATION	STATE	GENDER	TIME IN OFFICE
Burden-sharing	Two percent	There is no disagreement over commitment to reach the 2 percent benchmark that has been the case since at least 2014, and that was the continued understanding as recently as 4 weeks ago when I was in Brussels.	2/4/19	116th	Democratic Party	William Keating	Democrat	Massachusetts	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Do more	I believe that some on this committee are being blinded by their opposition of the current administration, resulting in the same hearing 3 weeks running. The only reason, because the administration is telling our NATO allies the hard truth, that you can do more.	2/4/19	116th	Democratic Party	Adam Kinzinger	Republican	Illinois	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent	I think we are all in agreement that the 2 percent goal for commitments by NATO countries is something that has been determined necessary. We need to continue to press them, especially some of our allies who have been backsliding. We know who they are.	2/4/19	116th	Democratic Party	James Manuel Costa	Democrat	California	Male	Incumbent

Table 10. Analysis of "The future of NATO: New challenges and opportunities", April 2nd, 2019.

Year-in and year-out, they are near the bottom of defense spending. Why does Germany continue to be such a problem when it comes to defense spending and in reaching the 2 percent GDP target?”

Another aspect that is important to note is that during the opening statements, congressman David Cicilline from Rhode Island asked to include the report ‘NATO at 70’ as part of the record, highlighting one crucial conclusion: “*President Donald Trump is regarded widely in NATO capitals as the alliance’s most urgent and often most difficult problem*”. On that same line, chairman William Keating also drew attention to the counterproductive effects of Trump’s behavior, declaring that any rhetoric that weakens the US’ allies or the alliance with them goes against the country’s national security interests. Therefore, a recurrent feature of the Congress debates is that members acknowledged the damage that Trump’s presidential style was causing (The historic American alliance with Europe, 2019).

Last but not least, a crucial event happened in this session: The role of Congress as a countering measure that could actively restore the harm inflicted on the transatlantic partnership and NATO was brought up. In the words of the Committee chairman Keating: “*This is not just a hearing. This is really the beginning of a central mission of this committee during this Congress. (...) I honestly believe that what we do as a Congress during this 2-year period, in particular, will have fundamental impact on our relations with our most important allies (...). We have work to do with the people in Europe, and that is why we are here today.*” Democrat congressman David Cicilline also agreed, “*I think this subcommittee will (...) play an important role in (...) being, in essence, the glue that reaffirms (...) the importance of this transatlantic relationship*”, but he also recognized the limitations of their work: “*My sense is still that world leaders look to the words and actions of the President and not the Congress*” (The historic American alliance with Europe, 2019).

THE FUTURE OF NATO: NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

On April 2nd, 2019, a hearing before the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives of the US Congress took place, this time to discuss “*The future of NATO: New challenges and opportunities*” in front of the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy and the Environment. The chamber admitted that, since it was the third debate dealing with the topic of transatlantic relations and NATO, the turnout of Congress

members was low (Out of the 22 members of the subcommittee, only 8 were present in the session, four from each party).

The analysis of the full transcript of the session (*Figure 10*) shows that Trump's main arguments about NATO appear only three times, and shockingly, more times coming from Democratic representatives than Republican (2 vs 1). All of them refer to the most recurrent topic and the one with most bipartisan support, burden-sharing. As the committee chairman William Keating points out, "*There is no disagreement over commitment to reach the 2 percent benchmark (...)*", an argument that is reiterated by Democrat James Manuel Costa, that approves of putting pressure on those who are not fulfilling their commitments "*I think we are all in agreement that the 2 percent goal for commitments by NATO countries is something that has been determined necessary. We need to continue to press them, especially some of our allies who have been backsliding. We know who they are*" (The future of NATO: New challenges and opportunities, 2019).

Nonetheless, there is an evident lack of mention of Trump's arguments, that can partially be explained by the fact that the meeting focused more on topics of energy security, democratic backsliding or Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 missile systems, but still evidences that the President's claims rarely made it to Congress this time.

Hardly any criticism can be found coming from the Republican side, and its ranking member Kinzinger once more took the chance to reassure the chamber of the general support for the alliance: "*NATO is not just an ally; they are our most important group of allies. (...) So, I reiterate my support for NATO, this committee's support, and the Congress' support for NATO and Europe*". And even though he claimed that part of the committee was blinded by their opposition to the current administration because it was telling the NATO allies "*the hard truth*", he did acknowledge that Trump's rhetoric might not be the most ideal way to conduct foreign policy: "*We can say it differently, but it is a message that needs to be said*" (The future of NATO: New challenges and opportunities, 2019).

The general feel of the chamber regarding the future of NATO can be summarized in Subcommittee chairman William Keating's words: "*We need strong American leadership along two fronts. The first is by making it clear that we are committed to NATO and that the alliance cannot be broken or undermined by our adversaries. The second, and the focus of this hearing today, is America's role in leading NATO and its member States and partners (...)*". Under Donald Trump's presidency, the US' leadership on both

of those fronts seems to be completely missing. (The future of NATO: New challenges and opportunities, 2019).

2.2.2 Debates on the main floor of the House of Representatives:

HR MEETING ON JULY 10TH, 2018: VOL. 164, NO. 115

On July 10th, 2018, the House of Representatives dedicated some time to discuss NATO in the main floor of the chamber, since the organization's 29th summit was set to start in its headquarters in Brussels the following day, and it would bring together the heads of state and heads of government of the member countries (including Donald Trump representing the US).

The analysis of the full transcript of the session (*Figure 11*) shows that only two of the statements deal with NATO: "NATO: Belly up to the bar" and "The 2018 NATO Summit". Out of those two, only the first one references Trump's main arguments about NATO, and it was made by Republican congressman Lloyd Theodore Poe of Texas. He mentions three of the arguments (Financial demands, burden-sharing and unfair treatment) a total of 5 times. 'Financial demands' is the most recurrent topic, with three mentions, while the other two only receive one mention each.

Congressman Lloyds' criticism towards NATO mainly focuses on the financial concerns that President Trump constantly repeats, stressing the lack of compliance with the 2% of GDP pledge for defense spending, going as far as to include in the record a full list of the 29 NATO countries divided into sub-lists depending on whether they met the 2% guideline or not. He also expressed his support for Trump's aggressive rhetoric: "*For years, there has been a historical problem of excuses made for non-compliance by some of our NATO allies. President Trump is right to bluntly encourage our friends to meet their obligations to deter Czar Putin*" (NATO: Belly up to the bar, 2018).

He also hints that the US' involvement in NATO is just to protect some European states (disregarding the benefits that the US gets out of his membership in the organization), while at the same time complaining about their lower level of spending: "*Neighbors in Texas ask me: Why does the United States spend more money defending some European countries than the countries do themselves? Fair question*". According to him, "*It is time to belly up to the bar and pay their share*". (NATO: Belly up to the bar, 2018).

TROPE	KEYWORD	STATEMENT	DATE	CONGRESS	MAJORITY IN THE CHAMBER	SPEAKER	PARTY AFFILIATION	STATE	GENDER	TIME IN OFFICE
Financial demands	Two percent	But to achieve this, everyone must contribute to the cause. Of the 29 nations within NATO, only 8 members—including the United States—are meeting the 2 percent of GDP pledge for defense spending.	10/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Lloyd Theodore Poe	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Obligations	For years, there has been a historical problem of excuses made for non-compliance by some of our NATO allies. President Trump is right to bluntly encourage our friends to meet their obligations to deter Czar Putin.	10/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Lloyd Theodore Poe	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment	Spend more than	Neighbors in Texas ask me: Why does the United States spend more money defending some European countries than the countries do themselves? Fair question.	10/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Lloyd Theodore Poe	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Commitment	Mr. Speaker, I support NATO, but our NATO allies would do well to stop criticizing the U.S. commitment to NATO and, rather, fully fulfill their commitment to our mutual defense.	10/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Lloyd Theodore Poe	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Pay their share	It is time to belly up to the bar and pay their share.	10/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Lloyd Theodore Poe	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent

Table 11. Analysis of the House of Representatives meeting, Vol. 164, No. 115 on July 10th, 2018.

TROPE	KEYWORD	STATEMENT	DATE	CONGRESS	MAJORITY IN THE CHAMBER	SPEAKER	PARTY AFFILIATION	STATE	GENDER	TIME IN OFFICE
Financial demands	Step up / Cost	Recently, the House passed the National Defense Authorization Act, which included my amendment urging our NATO allies to step up and participate in the cost of their own defense. President Trump was correct to raise this issue at the NATO summit in Brussels.	13/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Michael Dean Bishop	Republican	Michigan	Male	Incumbent
Unfair treatment	Unequal	America's commitment to our NATO allies is absolutely ironclad—it always has been—but for too long, the United States has shared an unequal financial burden in contributing to the global and regional security that NATO provides.	13/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Michael Dean Bishop	Republican	Michigan	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent	In 2014, each member country agreed to spend a minimum of 2 percent of their GDP on defense, but currently, only 5 of 29 member countries meet this threshold.	13/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Michael Dean Bishop	Republican	Michigan	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Commitments	With new challenges from an increasingly belligerent Russian state, instability across the Middle East and North Africa, and emerging cybersecurity threats around the world, it is time for our allies to honor their commitments.	13/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Michael Dean Bishop	Republican	Michigan	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Pull their own weight	As negotiators continue to finalize the NDAA conference report, I urge the inclusion of my amendment that passed the House to ensure our allies pull their own weight in support of our collective defense, which will strengthen NATO and help achieve peace through our collective commitment.	13/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Michael Dean Bishop	Republican	Michigan	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent	Some of our NATO allies are beside themselves over President Trump's calling out our NATO friends for not helping pick up the tab of 2 percent in military spending.	13/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Lloyd Theodore Poe	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Paying / Commitment	As a member of the U.S. NATO Parliamentary Assembly, I have been befuddled for years how some of the countries make excuses for not paying their committed share of NATO defense—defense against the Napoleon of Siberia, Putin. It is time for all NATO countries to be as concerned about European defense as America is. If President Trump's comments iked the sensibilities of our allies, well, they should just get the message. It is time for NATO to buck it up and keep their word and help pay for our common defense. And that is just the way it is.	13/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Lloyd Theodore Poe	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Pay		13/7/18	115th	Democratic Party	Lloyd Theodore Poe	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent

Table 12. Analysis of the House of Representatives meeting, Vol. 164, No. 118 on July 13th, 2018.

TROPE	KEYWORD	STATEMENT	DATE	CONGRESS	MAJORITY IN THE CHAMBER	SPEAKER	PARTY AFFILIATION	STATE	GENDER	TIME IN OFFICE
Burden-sharing	Two percent / GDP	That is why I am glad that this bill strongly supports the decision of the Wales Summit in 2014, that each member country should ramp up defense spending to 2 percent of their GDP.	22/1/19	116th	Democratic Party	Michael McCaul	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Commitment	An alliance of mutual defense is only as strong as each country's commitment to its spending goals. While some member countries have made great strides toward this commitment, others are still lagging behind.	22/1/19	116th	Democratic Party	Michael McCaul	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Commitment	But actions speak louder than words. No statement about the importance of NATO speaks as loudly as the tangible commitment each country makes to ensuring the strength of the alliance.	22/1/19	116th	Democratic Party	Michael McCaul	Republican	Texas	Male	Incumbent
Burden-sharing	Two percent	Now, all of us agree that we can continue to put pressure on our NATO partners to pay their self-stated goal of 2 percent of their GDP to this alliance.	22/1/19	116th	Democratic Party	James Vanni Panetta	Democrat	California	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Spending	It supports increased defense spending by NATO partners, as well as the funding of the European Deterrence Initiative to deter against Russian aggression.	22/1/19	116th	Democratic Party	James Vanni Panetta	Democrat	California	Male	Incumbent
Financial demands	Two percent	The legislation also expresses support for the agreement reached at the 2014 NATO Wales Summit calling upon each NATO member nation to allocate at least two percent of its gross domestic product to defense by 2024.	22/1/19	116th	Democratic Party	Sheila Jackson Lee	Democrat	Texas	Male	Incumbent

Table 13. Analysis of the House of Representatives meeting, Vol. 164, No. 118 on July 13th, 2018.

On the other hand, the second statement in the session regarding NATO, titled “The 2018 NATO summit” and issued by Democrat congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, used the occasion of the celebration of the summit to remind the chamber of the need to affirm the US’ commitment to NATO against Trump’s continuous offenses: “*Sadly and needlessly, our President's wishy-washy statements regarding the transatlantic alliance have already led to uncertainty and discomfort among our allies. How counterproductive. (...) This President's dangerous behavior is weakening U.S. leadership and global security*” (NATO: Belly up to the bar, 2018).

HR MEETING ON JULY 13TH, 2018: VOL. 164, NO. 118

Just three days later and immediately after the 2018 NATO summit came to an end, the House of Representatives once again allocated some time to discuss NATO in the main floor of the chamber on July 13th, 2018.

The analysis of the full transcript of the session (*Figure 12*) shows that four of that day’s statements deal with NATO: “Urging NATO allies to honor financial commitments”, “Disparaging NATO allies is not productive”, “Insulting behavior is unbecoming” and “Europe should pay their fair share for NATO”. Out of those four, only the first and the last one reference Trump’s main arguments about NATO, made by Republican congressmen Michael Dean Bishop and Lloyd Theodore Poe. They repeat three of Trump’s ideas (Financial demands, burden-sharing and unfair treatment) a total of 8 times. ‘Financial demands’ is the most recurrent topic, with four mentions, followed by burden-sharing with three and unfair treatment with just one.

Again, they mostly stress the need for NATO allies to honor their financial commitments to the organization, calling out those who don’t meet the 2% threshold, but at the same time tone it down by reaffirming the US’ engagement with the alliance. In the words of Republican congressmen Michael Dean Bishop, “*America’s commitment to our NATO allies is absolutely ironclad—it always has been—but for too long, the United States has shared an unequal financial burden (...)*” (Urging NATO allies to honor their financial commitments, 2018).

It should be noted that the phrasing both congressmen used portrays NATO as a mechanism to provide safety and security to just Europe, instead of being a mutually beneficial agreement for the US (For example, when Congressman Poe stated “*It is time for all NATO countries to be as concerned about European defense as America is*”, or

when Congressman Bishop said “*Recently, the House passed the National Defense Authorization Act, which included my amendment urging our NATO allies to step up and participate in the cost of their own defense*”). Taking it one step further, Congressman Poe even said that “*American teenagers went to war and shed blood two times in the last century to help save Europe*”, using one of Trump’s preferred strategies of emotional appeal to try and stir up the feelings of those listening (Europe should pay their fair share for NATO, 2018; Urging NATO allies to honor their financial commitments, 2018).

On the contrary, there were two voices that raised against Donald Trump’s “wrecking ball strategy” to handle the transatlantic partnership, like Virginia’s Democratic congressman Gerry Connolly, that firmly said “*The way to get NATO working is not to blow up a NATO summit, and it is not to disparage NATO allies (...). This is no way to conduct foreign policy. It is destructive, and it will hurt the United States’ interests that have been served long by our allies and by NATO in particular. I hope the President of the United States comes to his senses and understands talking discretely is far better than blowing it up*”. On that same line, Democrat Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee labelled Trump’s behavior during the summit as an “*assault on NATO*” that was “*embarrassing*” and considered “*outrageous*” that the US’ representative would be “*dastardly and rude*” in his interactions with other foreign leaders, up to a point where she ended her statement by saying “*That is not the American way. Shape up. Shape up, Mr. President*” (Disparaging NATO allies is not productive, 2018; Insulting behavior is unbecoming, 2018).

HR MEETING ON JANUARY 22ND, 2019: VOL. 165, NO. 13

On July 22nd, 2019, the House of Representatives had an important issue at hand: It had to debate and vote on the request to pass the bill *H.R. 676* or “*NATO support act*”, aimed at reiterating the unwavering support of the Congress of the United States for NATO, and that also included a crucial clause that prevented the President from withdrawing the US from NATO and rejected any of the efforts to reduce or stop contributions to NATO structures, activities or operations in a manner that creates a *de facto* withdrawal (Something that President Trump vaguely suggested several times).

The analysis of the full transcript of the session (*Figure 13*) shows that an entire and lengthy section of that day’s session in the chamber dealt with the debate on the NATO support act, before the bill was voted on. On that extract, Trump’s main arguments

about NATO appear a total of 6 times, 3 pronounced by members of the President's Republican party and the other 3 by Democrat representatives. In this case, all of them only refer to the two most recurrent topics, financial demands (4 times) and burden-sharing (2 times).

It is important to note that the criticism towards NATO on this specific debate was really mild, and it only focused on financial demands that are less controversial and agreed upon by both parties. If the fact that the bill also includes a clause that aims to continue working with NATO members for them to meet their 2014 Wales Defense Investment pledge commitments is considered, it shows that a strong support for NATO can go hand in hand with still demanding the spending commitments to be met, in a formal and respectful manner. For example, when looking at the statement of Republican congressman Michael MacCaul, "*An alliance of mutual defense is only as strong as each country's commitment to its spending goals. While some member countries have made great strides toward this commitment, others are still lagging behind*", we can see that the language is really toned down, and even acknowledges some countries' efforts (NATO Support Act, 2019).

On the other hand, there were many more Congress members that tried to debunk Trump's claims and vision on NATO, like Democrat James Panetta, that remarked that "*NATO is not a transactional relationship. Our sole focus can't be just on who pays and who gets what*", or Democrat Gerry Connolly, that stated that "*Our President has questioned the value of NATO and falsely claimed that NATO allies owe the United States money*", while at the same time drawing attention to the effect of Trump's provocative comments, that constantly undermine NATO's goal of projecting unity in the face of new threats (NATO Support Act, 2019).

After the debate, the bill obtained the necessary 2/3 majority and passed with 357 votes in favor (94% of the total) versus 22 against (6%, all from Republican Congress members) (H.R. 676: NATO Support Act, 2019). It therefore confirmed the chamber's position on NATO, that still considers it a critical component of the US' security and the foundation of its foreign policy, and showed that the country is solemnly committed to the principle of collective defense enshrined in Article 5. Congressman Eliot Engel, the proponent of the bill, highlighted that there is no partisan disagreement when it comes to the importance of NATO: "*So this bill, again, reiterates Congress' commitment to NATO. (...) It sends a clear message to our allies, to our adversaries, and to the administration that this branch of government fully supports the alliance, the collective defense of our*

allies, and peace across the North Atlantic region. (...) The last thing the United States should do is send mixed signals about our commitment, as this President, unfortunately, has done. (...) From Congress, you will get no such ambiguity. We hope our allies hear that (...)." (NATO Support Act, 2019).

2.2.3 AGGREGATED FINDINGS:

To have a better understanding of the findings, some figures will be provided. In the sample of debates of the US Congress on NATO analyzed (three hearings of the Committee of Foreign Affairs and three general meetings of the House of Representatives), Donald Trump's six main arguments on the alliance appeared a total of 58 times. Of those, 15 times were by members of the Democratic Party (26%) and 43 by members of the Republican Party (74%).

The most recurrent arguments were those related to monetary concerns, namely 'Financial demands', mentioned 22 times, 'Burden-sharing', mentioned 20 times. The next one in line was 'Unfair treatment', that appeared 12 times, followed by 'Obsolescence', that only showed up twice, and both 'Threat of pulling out of NATO' and 'Conditionality of Article 5' only did once.

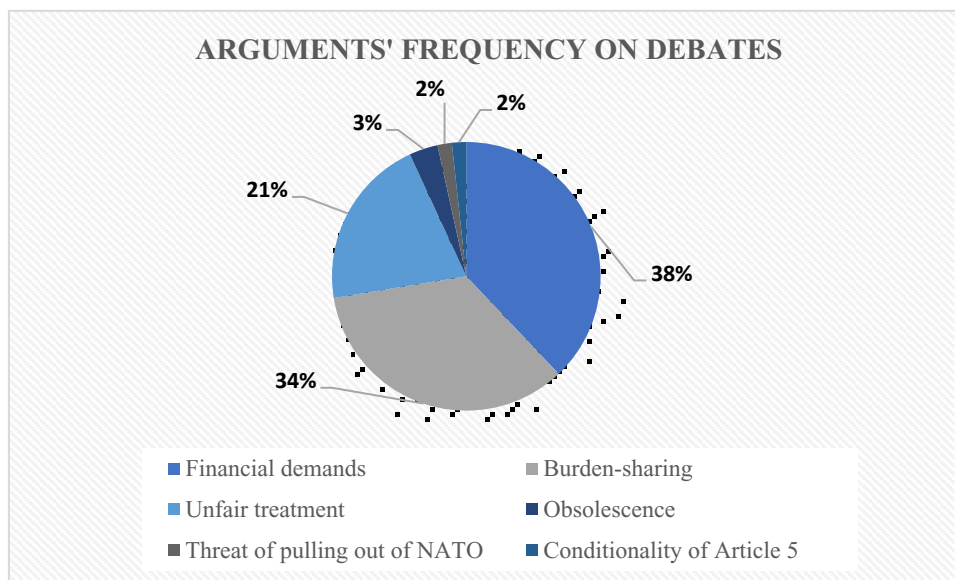


Figure 1. Aggregated frequency of appearance of Trump's NATO arguments in the entire sample.

All the Congress members that issued these claims were incumbent, and all of them were males.

3. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to assess if Donald Trump's populist foreign policy rhetoric can be linked to a discursive shift in the US Congress' debates on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, by conducting a deductive-inductive discourse analysis. In light of the sample material analysed, it can be safely argued that the political actors in the House of Representatives of the US Congress do not fully reproduce Trump's populist arguments used to criticize the alliance.

Even though all of Trump's six main arguments come up in the discussion from members of both sides of the political spectrum, they do so only occasionally, while the arguments supporting NATO are much more frequent and vehement. And even when some of the Committee members repeat any of the President's criticism, most of the times it comes accompanied by a strong declaration of support for the US' membership in NATO. It is unsurprising to observe that the majority of the complaints come from members of the President's Republican party (a 74%), those who tend to follow the President's policy direction, versus a significantly smaller 26% from the Democrats.

When looking at the few instances in which the arguments made it to the Congress member's narrative on NATO, the fact that the economic-related complaints are by far the most recurrent ('Financial demands' and 'Burden-sharing' make up a 72% of the total) shows that most of the members of Congress have not taken such an extreme position as Trump, and simply call for a fairer division of the cost of membership and for the other member states to step up their military and defense spending to reach the 2% GDP target. On the other hand, the most radical arguments (Obsolescence, threat of pulling out of NATO, and conditionality of Article 5%) barely get any relevance (less than 3% each) and show that they are not backed up by almost any members of the chamber.

Another distinctive feature of the appearance of these arguments in the House of Representatives emerges when looking at the language used compared to the one of the President, which shows that there is a difference in their stance: the Congress member's language is much more toned down. This can be explained based on the fact that they are not considered populists, while Donald Trump clearly is, and therefore do not reproduce many of the inherent features of populist discourse. Also, it should be taken into account that Trump was not a politician but a businessman that decided to run for the White House, while many of them have ample political experience behind them.

Consequently, the tone of their criticisms is much more polite and formal, while still expressing frustration, and they avoid using insults all together (unlike Trump, who called the European allies ‘delinquent’ or ‘stupid people’). However, other rhetorical strategies used by the President did make it to the chamber, like an oversimplification in language that appeals to emotions, or the fact that some Republican representatives decided to single out Germany and use it as a target for their demands.

It should be stated that not only did Trump’s arguments rarely appear on the Congress member’s addresses on NATO, but many of them decided to warn about the damaging effects of Trump’s rhetoric about the alliance instead. Their numerous complaints evidence that it had already become a well-known problem, making a recurrent feature of the Congress debates the acknowledgment of the harm that the President’s discursive style was causing, labelled as ‘embarrassing’, ‘outrageous’ and even a ‘wrecking ball strategy’. The only attempts at trying to defend this way to conduct foreign policy came from Republican representatives, on the basis that it was effective in getting the NATO member states to increase their financial contributions, but even they recognized that things could have been said in a better way, one that suited more the expected behavior of the occupant of the White House.

A crucial event, and something that further supports the argument that Donald Trump’s populist foreign policy rhetoric on NATO did not permeate the discourse on the US Congress, is the fact that many Congress members not only did not pick up on his arguments but instead insisted on the role of the chamber as a countering measure that could actively restore the harm inflicted on both NATO and the transatlantic alliance. Congress was described as the glue that would assert the importance of the partnership and of the membership in the alliance, regardless of the President’s behavior and actions, and the bearer of a key oversight role to hold the administration to account. Therefore, the chamber would become one more of the shock absorbers that could help the organization overcome occasional disagreements and rocky patches down the road and mitigate the effects of any crisis the alliance has to endure.

The best piece of evidence that summarizes the Congress’ position on NATO is the passage of the bill HR 676, or ‘*NATO support act*’, on January 22nd, 2019. Approved with 94% of the votes, it confirmed the unwavering support of the Congress of the United States for NATO and included a crucial clause that prevented the President from withdrawing the US from NATO, while still pushing the member states to meet their 2014 Wales Defense Investment pledge. That is, the bipartisan consensus on the importance of

NATO, considered a critical component of the US' security and the foundation of its foreign policy, is not inconsistent with demanding the European member states to meet their financial commitments with the organization.

Notably, Trump was a deviation not only from presidential tradition but also from that of the foreign policy establishment, as the tone of criticisms was new and much more divisive than the disagreements between those who preceded him and the US allies. No other president has questioned NATO's key role as a one of the most important contributors to US national security, and while it is undeniable that a larger trend of changing U.S. expectations about the Alliance has come to the surface, Trump undoubtedly breaks from historical presidential and bipartisan support for NATO and showed a complete disregard for the mutual EU-US recognition that was forged over decades of cooperation. Even if the background chapters revealed that the history of transatlantic relations is as old as the alliance itself, and that NATO has always received its fair share of criticism, the alliance has always managed to maintain its importance in the light of emerging security challenges, as the current war in Ukraine has evidenced.

Considering all the aforementioned, this research's findings are an indication of the lack of discursive connection between Donald Trump's narrative on NATO and that used on the House of Representatives of the US Congress, since his arguments appear only occasionally and fade when compared to the displays of support from Congress members, both Democratic and Republican. Moving forward, future research could take a broader historical perspective by adding a comparative element to the study and bring other US Presidents' take on NATO, or explore the differences between the stance of the current Joe Biden administration on the alliance and Trump's, when the data becomes available.

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ANNEX:

1. In-text references used to cite Donald Trump's statements, used in section 2.1.

DATE	STATEMENT TITLE	REFERENCE
21/3/16	CNN Transcripts. The Final Five: Interview with Donald Trump	Trump_statement_2016_1
29/3/16	Full Rush Transcript: Donald Trump, CNN Milwaukee Republican Presidential Town Hall	Trump_statement_2016_2
21/7/16	Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey's Coup Attempt and the world	Trump_statement_2016_3
27/7/16	Speech: Donald Trump in Scranton, PA	Trump_statement_2016_4
16/1/17	Full transcript of interview with Donald Trump	Trump_statement_2017_1
25/5/17	Remarks by President Trump at NATO Unveiling of the Article 5 and Berlin Wall Memorials	Trump_statement_2017_2
8/12/17	Speech: Donald Trump holds a political rally in Pensacola, Florida	Trump_statement_2017_3
5/7/18	Speech: Donald Trump holds a political rally in Great Falls, Montana	Trump_statement_2018_1
11/7/18	Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at Bilateral Breakfast	Trump_statement_2018_2
12/7/18	Remarks by President Trump at press conference after 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels	Trump_statement_2018_3