

Preface

This book concludes a research project devoted to studying one of the most intriguing issues in current international relations: the role of the US in the spatially fragmented and highly uncertain contemporary international system. The book attempts to answer at least two fundamental questions: how has the US adapted to such a peculiar strategic environment? To what extent is the US still producing and sustaining order—and what kind of order—at the system level and within the different regional subsystems?

This project has grown over time and has been discussed over the last two years, especially in the panels we organized, to this end, at the Italian Political Science Association conferences in Cosenza (10–12 September 2015) and Milan (15–17 September 2016). Many colleagues participated in these panels in person and others contributed to the project remotely. We thank them all for their highly appreciated scholarship and kind availability.

The project resulted in a volume consisting of four parts. Part I deals with global issues and investigates what the US has done to defend its system-level interests, as well as the fundamental norms and practices on which it built the international order during the Cold War. Parts II–IV deal with the most strategically relevant contemporary regional subsystems: Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific. These investigate the US posture towards these regions; the policies the US has taken to face the most relevant challenges in each of them; and whether, and if so how, these policies have been mutually influential with one another and with global policies.

The US presidential elections took place when our journey was almost over. We factored the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America into the book, combining an issue area perspective with an overall review. Firstly, we asked our contributors to comment on how the Trump presidency could conceivably change the claims they were advancing in their chapters, which were devoted to considering specific aspects of US foreign policy. Secondly, we concluded the book with a chapter that placed President Trump against the backdrop of the US traditional foreign policy culture and posture, in order to grasp what

impact he could have on the basal guidelines of the US grand strategy, as well as on the international system.

We thank the authors of this edited volume for engaging so astutely with the unexpected change in the US leadership. Even though, at the time we are writing—early February 2017—the assessment of President Trump’s foreign policy remains a matter for speculation, we are confident that the contributions of our authors offer useful insights into, and reflections on, the prospects for the US and the US-led international order. Of course, the responsibility for any remaining shortcoming rests solely with us.

Pavia, Italy
Bologna, Italy
Rome, Italy

Marco Clementi
Matteo Dian
Barbara Pisciotta

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Clementi, M.; Dian, M.; Pisciotto, B. (Eds.)
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