

a most intriguing clue for comprehending what had happened: the

Our argument is developed in several stages. Immediately following, we show why it is that the comparisons to Mussolini really do constitute such a big analytical stretch—far too big for us to endorse. After that, our next section concentrates on the Italian comparison that we think is of greater relevance, the one with Berlusconi. Our penultimate section is comparative in a different way, for in it we look “diachronically” at two eras in the recent record of U.S. transatlantic diplomacy, the Bill Clinton/George W. Bush years and the present. We pose the question of whether Donald Trump can be counted upon to “make America grate again” with the allies, and if so, why, and how the Berlusconi trope could be of relevance to this discussion. Our conclusion provides our answers to these questions.

NOT ANOTHER “MAN OF PROVIDENCE”: THE LIMITS OF THE TRUMP-MUSSOLINI ANALOGY

For anyone familiar with Benito Mussolini'

the comparison with Il Duce more misleading than enlightening.¹² The problem with analogies is well known: they often prevent us from better understanding current events because they can lead us to miss seeing what is novel in our quest to glimpse something familiar.¹³ That said, we intend to resort to analogy, and in so doing we employ this logical resource in accordance with the advice tendered by Jeffrey Herf, as a means of “sketch[ing] out the domains in which a comparison might make sense.”¹⁴ We think that there are two such domains that have been neglected by the Trump-as-Mussolini camp: the socioeconomic context surrounding Trump/Mussolini’s fortunes and the role of institutional actors in supporting/hampering the rise of Trump/fascism. Neither sustains the case that Trump resembles Mussolini, save in the most superficial sense.

In short, we are not primarily interested here in the rhetorical and communicative aspects that have characterized Trump’s rise up to now; these we take to be epiphenomenal. Nor are we concerned with the nationalistic stamp apparent in both leaders’ rhetoric—an “agenda item” that Trump indisputably shares with the Italian dictator. Instead, our critique of the Trump-Mussolini analogy is that its exclusive focus on the person (and his acts) misses one all-important consideration, neglecting as it does the critical role played by contextual factors. It is the latter that could (or would) eventually determine whether and how the towheaded tycoon might follow in the footsteps of the Italian dictator. A brief look at the origins of fascism—or better, at the way through which Mussolini came to power—suffices to highlight the obvious, namely, that 2017 America is not, and never can be, 1922 Italy. And this, we think, makes all the difference in the world.¹⁵

¹²For more nuanced views on the Trump-Mussolini analogy, see Isaac Chotiner, “Is Donald Trump a Fascist? Yes and No,” *Slate*, 10 February 2016, accessed at http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/interrogation/2016/02/, 19 May 2017; and Holger Stark, “An Exhausted Democracy: Donald Trump and the New American Nationalism,” *Die Zeit*, 17 May 2016, accessed at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/essay-donald-trump-and-the-new-american-nationalism-a-1092548.html>, 13 June 2017; and Sheri Berman, “Donald Trump Isn’t a Fascist,” *Vox*, 3 January 2017, accessed at [http://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/1/3/14154300/fascist-populist-trump-democracy,2017-2\(is\)-443.Exhau0TD.001](http://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/1/3/14154300/fascist-populist-trump-democracy,2017-2(is)-443.Exhau0TD.001).

Accordingly, our initial domain of comparison is provided by the socio-economic context, which can, in turn, be broken down into two parts. The first relates to the main fractures dividing American and Italian societies, today and in the past. The second concerns the nature of America's current (purported) crisis when it is contrasted with the catastrophic state of the Italian economy after the First World War. We start with societal fractures. Italy in the first decades of the twentieth century was undergoing a painful process of modernization, marked by the mushrooming of its industrial sector and the consequent expansion of its working class. However, agriculture remained the primary source of wealth for the majority of the population and the main generator of employment. As a result, two principal cleavages ran through Italian society. The first of these, situated almost exclusively in Italy's big (and northern) cities, was between the entrepreneurial and the working class. The second, spread out in rural areas all over the country, was between large landowners and farmers.¹⁶ Initially a heterogeneous gathering of anarchists, revolutionary unionists, student associations, and cultural vanguards, fascism quickly changed colors and ended up supporting rather than opposing the

be much more capable, at least for a time, in generating favorable levels of public support than Trump has been. Nor did the early Mussolini years feature anything like the degree of administrative mishap and chaos that so far has attended the Trump administration, which as we write this has just suffered the huge indignity of being unable to get enshrined into legislation what has been for seven years the signature item on the Republicans' wish list of reforms, namely, the repeal of "Obamacare"—and this notwithstanding that the Trump presidency presumably could avail itself of the luxury of having a Republican Congress in both houses (what some refer to, not necessarily in jest, as "unified government").¹⁹ If Trump is indeed Mussolini and thus, by extension, a fascist, as his most hyperbolic critics insist, he is so in a most Pickwickian manner.

To say again, the reason for the inapplicability of the Mussolini analogy

uncontrolled over the U.S. border, and record-high crime rates. All of these represented alternative facts that nevertheless served him well with a certain segment of the electorate, as became evident on 8 November. Still, there is a tremendous difference between the conditions—objective as well as subjective—with which the agricultural and war-torn Italian economic system was confronted in the 1920s and those facing today's America. Mussolini sought and found fertile ground for the establishment of his rule in deep societal cleavages and in the demonstrably evident failure of the previous liberal regime; it will scarcely be possible for Trump to have the same results exploiting "crisis."

As concerns the role of institutional actors, two stand out as critical elements for the successful rise of fascism in the Italian case: the army and the monarchy. In brief, historians agree that one of Mussolini's main achievements in 1920–1922 was to prevent any serious opposition from the military and the king. In fact, with reference to the former, it is worth stressing how the March on Rome (and Squadrist violence before that) would hardly have been possible without the substantial complicity (or lack of capacity) of the armed forces. Mussolini understood that by having the army and navy on his side

to increase by 10 percent, or \$54 billion.²⁹ However, some considerations suggest we refrain from drawing any hasty inferences. To begin with, the stature of Diaz and Thaon di Revel was not at all comparable with that of Mattis, McMaster, or Kelly. Trump evinces a genuine esteem for his military colleagues, and most observers (not excluding some of the president's critics) would agree that the generals are among the most competent members of the Trump team—if, indeed, they are not the most competent. By contrast, Mussolini had a much less lofty regard for both Diaz and Thaon di Revel, his ministers of war and the navy, respectively; their value to him was indirect, inhering to no small degree in their closeness to the king. Mussolini neither relied on their counsel nor showed himself to be restrained in any significant way by their preferences. Indeed, both were led to resign, and to withdraw from public life, after just a few short years in Mussolini's cabinet, Diaz departing at the end of April 1924 and Thaon di Revel in May 1925.

Trump's case is otherwise. His choice of the two ex-generals and the one serving general (McMaster) was hardly needed to curry favor with an American military establishment that tended to be supportive of him from the outset; instead, his choice was a function of an inexperienced president's desire to fulfill his promise to "hire the best and brightest." Admittedly, it remains far too early to conclude that the generals have definitively counterbalanced the ostensible influence of some of Trump's

short time after the war. It is worth remembering that Mussolini himself made a U-turn from his wartime—and highly vocal—republicanism to a monarchism that may have been watered-down and reluctantly embraced but was not without its utility to him. According to Patrizia Dogliani, sticking to the king helped fascism garner support from the southern aristocracy, convinced as it was that Giovanni Giolitti's liberal project had simply been a usurpation of power by the northern (mostly Piedmontese) elite. And although it is true that the consolidation of the regime quickly eroded the effective power of the king, the monarchy formally remained an autonomous center of power throughout the (that is, the two-decade period of fascist rule).³¹

Mussolini played his cards very skillfully, in the process effectively neutralizing institutional counterweights. Trump, on the other hand, seems to have no clear ideas on how to counter the opposition that his rise to power has already begun to generate in Washington.³² Clearly, he has not had to bother appeasing any monarchs, but the checks and balances of the American political system do feature actors as powerful as the Congress, especially the Senate, whose Republican majority can look a bit deceptive, given that at least a half dozen GOP senators cannot be taken to be guaranteed allies of the president.³³ Nor, as the difficulty in repealing Obamacare illustrates, can the president even count on commanding the loyalty of the House. Then there is the judiciary, to say nothing of the bureaucracy of the executive branch itself, which cannot at all be assumed to be ready to follow where a President Trump would desire to lead it; in fact, some have suggested that, like Abraham Lincoln, Donald Trump has deliberately amassed a cabinet of "rivals" (not necessarily of his, but of their fellow cabinet members), so as to constitute a further balance, and perhaps even a check.³⁴

To sum up, while there may be a few features of Trump's campaign that echoed tenets and forms of fascism, it is unlikely that the real estate tycoon augurs, as some seem to fear, the seco.9(th6uPc4TJT eF3f,2177)332.12.8332.12.3itini.

IF THE SHOE FITS: ANALOGIZING BETWEEN TRUMP AND BERLUSCONI

As Donald Trump was defying all the odds and continuing his most improbable ascent throughout the 2016 GOP primary campaign, there was a rising chorus of concern in Europe (as elsewhere). This concern was not surprising, for to many on the Old Continent, Trump seemed all too familiar a politician. He reminded them of Silvio Berlusconi, a contemporary Italian political figure not universally cherished in European (including Italian) public memory. Right off the bat, and for this reason alone, we can see a much greater degree of “fit” between Trump and Berlusconi than we detected between the former and Mussolini. Comparisons between Trump and Berlusconi can provide both a logical and a narrative shortcut for political analysis, as well as for normative assessment.³⁵ For if Silvio Berlusconi had been earlier deemed “unfit to lead Italy,”³⁶ as well as “unfit to lead Europe,”³⁷ then how, wondered many, could it be that his American doppelgänger, Donald Trump, could be thought capable of leading the world’s remaining superpower, the United States of America? (Of course, more than a few Italian voters had decided that Berlusconi, after all, fit to rule their country, three times, in fact, from 1994 to 2011.) Now, none of us are deluded enough to believe that American voters this past November were taking cues from recent Italian political developments—not even for a nanosecond. Nonetheless, the comparison with Berlusconi is suggestive, for the similarities between the former Italian leader and the American one are numerous and various, ranging as they do from the significant, for example, a common appreciation of the virtues of Russia’s Vladimir Putin, to the trivial, for instance, a close scrutiny of hairstyles (their own). For the sake of simplicity, we group in this section the most relevant of these commonalities around three axes, highlighting personality, policies, and politics.

Regarding personalities, it has to be said that Berlusconi and Trump

latter including sports for the Italian tycoon, once owner of a world-renowned soccer team, A.C. Milan. Both have been rich enough to finance their own political activities without depending on established political parties.³⁸ Both are successful communicators who hook up with people reasonably effectively. Both deliberately disregard social conventions and rules of etiquette in order to command attention and attraction. Both have egos that, to put it mildly, hardly suffer from psychological malnutrition.

some similarities with the inter-war fascists." Like those earlier figures, "today's right-wing extremists denounce incumbent democratic leaders as inefficient, unresponsive, and weak. They promise to nurture their nation, protect it from its enemies, and restore a sense of purpose to people who feel battered by forces outside their control." But for all that, they are not antidemocratic, even if they are decidedly antiliberal. Their mission, they say, is to perfect democracy, not replace it, and they promise better government. The upshot is that when they do come to power, it can be assumed that the "continued existence of democracy will permit their societies to opt for a do-over by later voting them out. Indeed, this may be democracy's greatest strength: it allows countries to recover from their mistakes."⁴⁶

If this is so, then what can the Italian case tell us? More to the point, if this shoe fits so well, can we assume that Berlusconi's legacy provides us some "teachable moments" when it comes to President Trump's prospects, domestic and international? To answer this question, we first need to raise a prior question, one that asks whether, and if so, how, Berlusconi managed to change contemporary Italy—in the process without damaging it fundamentally as a well-consolidated democracy with a developed economy, something Italy had *not* been at the beginning of the twentieth century.

To start with, it has to be acknowledged that Berlusconi contributed to the restructuring of the Italian party system by successfully acting as a coalition builder—almost despite himself.⁴⁷ He "occupied and expanded a political space that had previously been politically narrow and fragmented—the Right—drawing together two completely different political forces: the post-fascist right-wing National Alliance (AN) . . . and the Northern League (LN) which supported the independence of the north and radical political change. In their traditions, language and strongholds, AN and the League represent opposed political formations."⁴⁸

Berlusconi thus became t11.sit a2c59me if4F51Tf7.0842e orium7(dC(us)es)-

supported by heterogeneous and fragmented parliamentary majorities. The result is that despite his much-ballyhooed record, Berlusconi remained constantly hemmed in by parliamentary politics, Italian style. Being the longest-serving leader since the Second World War did not make Berlusconi the archetypal "strongman."

Furthermore, it needs to be noted that Berlusconi's freedom of maneuver was steadily checked and balanced by other constitutional powers. In fact, he engaged in a decade-long arm-wrestling contest with constitutional judges and presidents of the republic (the latter the supreme guarantor of national unity and fair political competition), each of whom repeatedly exerted their powers to block or change laws intended to advantage Berlusconi's personal interests or persona.

profited from the opportunity to drain the Italian swamp, promising to do so through structural political change and a new economic "miracle," which was supposed to lead to a return to the kind of burgeoning development Italy had known right after the Second World War.

So much for the promise. The reality was that Berlusconi left Italy in

First, it bears repeating that although Trump's brand of populism has battered upon a popular dissatisfaction with the American political system, no one should ever be allowed to confuse the dysfunctional nature of U.S. politics with the much more troubled Italian system that served as the backdrop for Berlusconi's rise to power. Earlier, we remarked that the

balances is even more powerful than the executive. As Richard Neustadt reminds us, although the Constitutional Convention of 1787 might have been thought to have yielded a "government of 'separated powers' [.] [i]t did nothing of the sort. Rather, it created a government of separated institutions, not powers."⁵⁴ This is unlike the situation in European democracies, even if they too feature a separation of powers. In the United

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Regarding the substance of Italy's foreign policy, Berlusconi changed it

EU members were seeking to comanage such compelling issues and crises as the Balkans and Afghanistan wars and the nuclear deal with Iran.

So, to recap a bit, if we are convinced that Trump is , , Mussolini but that he may well be the "Berlusconi"

dependent upon the sometimes ineffable notion of “temperament.” This is what bringing the “bunga bunga”⁶⁴ to America implies: that the United States is being led by a chief executive who demonstrates many of the personality foibles—not excluding lack of focus and a propensity toward prevarication—put on such regular display by Silvio Berlusconi. This, in turn, can be counted upon to generate an unhealthy erosion of the ability of President Trump’s fellow leaders in the Atlantic alliance to have much confidence in his judgment or to trust his leadership.

This is why the Italianization thesis possesses significance for the transatlantic alliance. It is not that Silvio Berlusconi proved to be troublesome for transatlantic relat

Precisely because the problem is one of temperament and character, it will not get better. It will get worse, as power intoxicates Trump and those around him. It will probably end in calamity—substantial domestic protest and violence, a breakdown of international economic relationships, the collapse of major alliances, or perhaps one or more new wars (even with China) on top of the ones we already have. It will not be surprising in the slightest if his term ends not in four or in eight years, but sooner, with impeachment or removal under the 25th Amendment. The sooner Americans get used to these likelihoods, the better.⁶⁶

Is Cohen's pessimism justified in the sphere of foreign policy? Does Trump bid fair to exacerbate relations with the Europeans so as to lead to NATO's "collapse"? We tend to doubt that he does, but even if the alliance will survive, there is every likelihood that the coming years

might generate important consequences for America's relationship with European allies.

We find it helpful to introduce at this juncture a framework for analysis that will be familiar to many students of international politics. We refer to Kenneth Waltz's three "images," or levels of analysis, stemming from his Columbia University dissertation, which led to his first and, in some respects, most significant book, titled *Man, the State, and War: A New Realist Theory of International Politics*.⁶⁹ What Waltz labeled the "first image" puts the causative emphasis upon individual decision makers; his "second image" privileges the makeup of the discrete "units" of the international system, inquiring as it does into particular traits of individual states or the societies contained within them (or both); and his "third image" highlights the international system as the most important level of analysis—the system being understood both by its organizing principle of anarchy and its distribution of relative capability (also known as "power").

Although the subject matter that inspired Waltz's inquiry was the "cause" of war, we believe his framework can be applied to any number of other queries in international politics, including and especially those probing the nature and political significance of anti-Americanism in the transatlantic political sphere. How so? First-image analysts of FFAA would claim it is primarily, if not exclusively, a function of the personalities and behavior of American presidents; second-image analysts would emphasize societal (cultural) cleavages as between the United States and the transatlantic allies; and third-image analysts would stress how FFAA is correlated with asymmetries in power between Washington and the other NATO members, irrespective of personalities and cultures.

Anti-Americanism has been a topic of great debate in recent years, and not only in the particular variant covered here. Like so many important concepts in political science, it has resisted easy definition and sparked a great deal of controversy, to say nothing of heaps of scholarly and policy research.

and allies, so much so that one U.S. defense secretary in the administration of Jimmy Carter was heard to query, apropos the receipt of news that the alliance had fallen into disarray, "When has NATO ever been in array?"⁷⁵

As we know, these intra-alliance tensions of the Cold War, however grave they may have appeared at the time, ultimately proved to be less than fatal from the point of view of America

stem from America's being made to grate again on European sensibilities during the Trump era.

The French critique of America during the first flush of unipolarity was important not just because Paris seemed to be leading the charge against Washington (it doing this) but also because of the reasons why it did so. France might not have been the country in which this ideological dispensation we know of as anti-Americanism originated, but it certainly

during the Kosovo War of 1999, a conflict that for a time looked more to have pitted the United States against France than to have ranged either of these allies against Serbia.⁸² It was a position suffused with the conviction that “multipolarity” was a much more propitious structure of the international system than either of the two logical alternatives of bipolarity and unipolarity. No one manifested this structural (third-image) aspect of FFAA better than Hubert Vedrine, who served as Lionel Jospin’s minister of foreign affairs from 1997 to 2002. To Vedrine, what constituted the crux of the problem for Paris was not so much American behavior (held to be epiphenomenal) but rather American power—power, that is, that was relative to others in the international system at a time when the historical adversary of the Cold War era of bipolarity had ceased to exist. For the French, it was simply inconceivable that America could be enjoined or expected to behave in a more satisfactory manner if the principal determinant of that behavior—its relative capability—was not somehow “balanced.” To his credit, Vedrine acknowledged that were Paris to possess as much power as Washington did, it probably would behave in a manner judged by allies to be even more insufferable than American behavior.⁸³

It would, of course, be highly misleading to imagine that this structural, one could almost say “antiseptic,” variant of FFAA was the sole version on offer in France.⁸⁴ France, as elsewhere in Europe, also had critics of America whose targets were the latter

Just as many were convinced that, to the extent that a new era of FFAA loomed in the transatlantic world, it had much more to do with sentiments of abandonment than with anything else. Noted the German tabloid *Bild*, while *Sunday Express* had developed for itself quite a reputation for being anti-American during the years in which the Iraq War was inflaming passions in the transatlantic world, "[t]hen it was often American interventionism that