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# A Manchurian Candidate? The GOP's Discourse on the Russian War in Ukraine

Eva Rieger 

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**Abstract** The United States has a longstanding tradition regarding its overall foreign policy, in the form of a bipartisan consensus. This includes—among other things—maintaining alliances and curbing the influence of rivals (e.g., Russia). Since this consensus has been in place, traditionally the Republican Party (GOP) has been especially intent on a less cooperative and more containing or deterring stance towards Russia. With former U.S. President Donald Trump, we can see a turning point in this behaviour by the GOP. Trump's obvious admiration for Russian president Putin and his statements about Putin being overly favourable, while simultaneously questioning NATO and the United States' commitment to defend Eastern European partners, show a distinctive shift in the GOP's discourse. This renunciation has subsequently been picked up by parts of the Republican Party, rendering the bipartisan consensus a contested issue. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 now constitutes an important external shock influencing said discursive shift. By drawing on discourse-bound identity theory and discourse analysis, the GOP's discourse regarding Russia and NATO is expected to have (substantially) changed in a kind of *Zeitenwende*—back towards the bipartisan consensus. This article will, therefore, analyse the statements of prominent Republicans after the Russian invasion, compare them to Trump's positions on these issues, and identify whether the invasion serves as a formative event that creates an overall shift in rhetoric and positions.

**Keywords** U.S. foreign policy discourse · Republican Party · NATO · Ukraine war · Bipartisan consensus

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## Ein Manchurian-Kandidat? Der Diskurs der Republikanischen Partei zu Russlands Krieg in der Ukraine

**Zusammenfassung** Die USA haben eine langanhaltende Tradition in ihrer allgemeinen Außenpolitik, in Form des sog. „bipartisan consensus“. Darin enthalten sind u. a. das Erhalten von Allianzen und die Einschränkung des Einflusses von Rivalen (bspw. Russlands). Seit dieser Konsens existiert, verfolgen die Republikaner traditionellerweise einen weniger kooperativen, eher einhegenden und abschreckenden Kurs gegenüber Russland. Mit dem früheren US-Präsidenten Trump kann man hier eine Wende im Verhalten der Partei erkennen. Die Verschiebung des Republikanischen Diskurses zeigt sich klar mit seiner offensichtlichen Bewunderung für Russlands Präsident Putin und seinen lobenden Aussagen über diesen, während er die NATO und die Verteidigungspflicht gegenüber osteuropäischen Partnern hinterfragt. Diese Abkehr von früheren Positionen wurde daraufhin von Teilen der Republikanischen Partei übernommen, wodurch der bisherige „bipartisan consensus“ contestet wird. Die russische Invasion der Ukraine im Februar 2022 stellt hierbei nun einen entscheidenden externen Schock dar, der diesen diskursiven Wandel beeinflussen kann. Unter der Einbeziehung der diskursgebundenen Identitätstheorie und einer Diskursanalyse wird davon ausgegangen, dass sich der Republikanische Diskurs zu Russland und der NATO (erheblich) gewandelt hat – zurück zum „bipartisan consensus“ in einer *Art Zeitenwende*. Dafür werden in diesem Artikel Aussagen relevanter Republikaner:innen nach der russischen Invasion analysiert, mit den Positionen Trumps zu diesen Themen verglichen und festgestellt, ob es sich demnach um ein formatives Ereignis handelt, durch das ein genereller Wandel in Rhetorik und Einstellungen entsteht.

**Schlüsselwörter** US-Außenpolitik Diskurs · Republikanische Partei · NATO · Ukraine-Krieg · Bipartisan consensus

### 1 Introduction

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marks an external shock in many foreign policy discourses, for Europe as well as its allies (e.g., the United States). This act of Russian aggression constitutes a breach of international law that worries Russia's neighbours (i.e., Eastern Europe, Sweden, and Finland) and was condemned by the majority of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN). It subsequently brought about changes of foreign policy (discourses) in a number of countries (United Nations 2022). Considering Ukraine's plea for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—after their first bid had been denied in 2008—examining the effects of the Russian invasion on the discourses in NATO member states seems especially worthwhile. This is underlined by the fact that oftentimes comparisons to the Cold War are drawn in the face of NATO's apparent united stance against Russia. In this respect, the discourse in the United States, as the erstwhile enemy of Russia's predecessor state (the Soviet Union), offers a particularly significant view on this. During the Cold War, the Republican

Party (GOP) in particular was known for its hard stance against the Soviet Union. This approach persisted after the fall of the Soviet Union and transitioned into a traditionally sceptical and hawkish behaviour towards Russia by the GOP (Bierling 2000, pp. 125–126, 130). It is worth noting that Democrats have recently shown more anti-Russian views than Republicans have (Tama 2023, p. 118).

For some time, Donald Trump's emergence in the political sphere and especially his presidency were characterized as a turning point in the overall American political landscape, and also especially in the Republican Party (Dück et al. 2020; Sperling and Webber 2019; Steff 2021). Because he has broken not only with etiquette and traditions but also with long-standing (Republican) policies, he is said to have transformed the party. This is especially noticeable in his divergence from the so-called bipartisan foreign policy consensus<sup>1</sup> (BFPC), which Trump himself announced he would break, even though it has been adhered to by both parties since the Second World War (Dück et al. 2020; Sperling and Webber 2019, p. 511). Under the influence of Donald Trump and his followers, the GOP then deviated from this stance towards Russia and NATO, and it can be observed that the Republican Party gradually diverted from the BFPC, even in the face of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. This suggests a clear discursive shift within the GOP. The most prominent examples for this are Donald Trump saying he “had a very, very good relationship” (Trump 2019) with Vladimir Putin and praising him (Orr et al. 2022; Trump 2018), while also calling NATO obsolete and questioning his own commitment to Article V<sup>2</sup> (BBC 2017; Sanger and Haberman 2016a, b).

However, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the continuing war serve as an external shock that has brought the importance of the transatlantic alliance and fears of an expansionist Russia back to the forefront. As a result, the United States has to reevaluate its strategic priorities, which had previously shifted from Europe towards the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> This brings up the question of whether this has the quality of a formative event bringing about changes in foreign policy discourse. Specifically, does the Russia–Ukraine war work as a formative event that affects the GOP's prior discursive shift giving back discursive hegemony to the bipartisan consensus? Or do Trump's deviations represent a sustainable discursive shift in U.S. foreign policy? To answer this, I will draw on discourse-bound identity theory and discourse analysis to examine the GOP's discourse on these issues following February 2022. This means analysing the statements of prominent Republicans after the Russian invasion, comparing them to Trump's and GOP

<sup>1</sup> The issues included in the bipartisan consensus are maintaining alliances (e.g., NATO), committing to nonproliferation and denuclearisation of states considered dangerous to the United States, supporting Israel, curbing the influence and global impact of rivals (e.g., Russia and China), preserving the global economic system, and addressing challenges to the U.S.-led international system posed by nonstate actors (i.e., terrorism; Reveron et al. 2015, p. 113). Similarly, Ikenberry (2017, p. 3) speaks of it as the liberal international order “organized around economic openness, multilateral institutions, security cooperation, democratic solidarity, and internationalist ideals.”

<sup>2</sup> This refers to Article V of NATO's founding treaty, which lays the legal ground for mutual defense within the organization.

<sup>3</sup> This reorientation started under Obama's presidency with Secretary of State Clinton's “pivot to Asia” strategy.

leadership's positions on these issues, and identifying whether an overall change is discernible.<sup>4</sup> The material used for this analysis includes congressional debates concerning Russia, Ukraine, or NATO, as well as other public remarks in (social) media.

Looking into the literature on the bipartisan consensus, several recent works ascertain its retreat (especially among Republicans) over the last decades (e.g., Böller 2022a, b; Dück et al. 2020; Dueck 2020, pp. 1–8), with many citing polarisation taking over foreign policy as well as domestic issues (e.g., Friedrichs and Tama 2022; Homan and Lantis 2022; Maxey 2022; Smeltz 2022; Tama 2023, p. 6). In them, Trump is usually considered an accelerator or a symptom of polarisation rather than an instigator. On the other hand, many researchers argue that the bipartisan consensus remains fairly robust on various important foreign policy issues (especially NATO; e.g., Böller 2022a, 2023; Tama 2023). Bryan and Tama (2022) came to the conclusion that although foreign policy debates have become more polarised, voting patterns still display a relatively stable BFPC. Overall, there is general agreement that the BFPC has decreased (with differing views of the extent) but that this decrease started before Trump's presidency, which only accelerated it. Further, most works argue that the bipartisan consensus remains intact in some areas, with Tama (2023) and Böller (2023) both determining its robustness concerning the Russia–Ukraine war. Thus, the contrast between promotion of a lasting liberal world order with the BFPC and a continuous shift away from it has been established.

In this paper, I wish to add to this literature by giving insight into the development of the GOP's adherence to the BFPC, which can be traced and understood more deeply with a discourse analysis of their arguments than with a simple analysis of voting and bill proposals (especially with issues like NATO and Russia that are not traditionally split along the left–right dimension (Tama 2023, p. 218)). Thus, the added value of my research lies in analysing the use and prevalence of different discursive formations within the Republican discourse, which can help in understanding the fading discursive hegemony of the bipartisan consensus—even in light of the Russia–Ukraine war. By looking at the GOP's discourse in Congress, I can trace the development of support regarding NATO and Ukraine since the invasion in 2022 as well as link it to U.S. identity. As such, looking at the underlying arguments and organizing them along discursive formations gives indications about whether there is fundamental opposition to legislation or if the underlying arguments are about greater congressional control. In the following, I will first give an overview of the discourse-bound identity theory, discourse analysis, and previous research on U.S. foreign policy (discourse). Next, Trump's positions on the issues of NATO and Russia will be presented. These will then be compared to statements by (prominent) Republicans following the Russian invasion, and a final conclusion on discursive hegemony will be drawn.

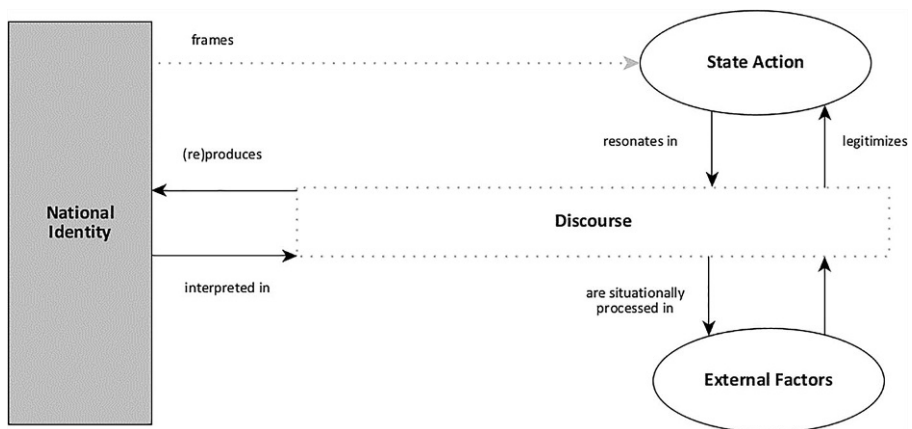
<sup>4</sup> Although Trump does not represent the full Republican discourse, he clearly exercised great influence over the party during his presidency and controlled much of the narrative, since most GOP leaders either fell in line or were shunned. His positions will mostly serve as a reference point, and as such, a discursive hegemony for them within the GOP would then imply its sustainability.

## 2 Discourse-Bound Identity Theory and U.S. Foreign Policy

According to discourse-bound identity theory, national identity forms a discursively mediated framework within which state action is accepted as appropriate by all members of society (Stahl 2012, p. 578). The GOP's internal struggle for direction—especially in line with the 2022 midterm elections and the 2024 presidential election primaries—includes foreign policy aspects. This is manifested in the party's discourse around critical and contested issues because uncontested topics usually contribute to discourse only in the form of affirmations. Thus, a focus on their stance regarding Russia, Ukraine, and NATO shows the effects of the Russia–Ukraine war while further giving insight into a possible broader change of Republican foreign policy discourse concerning the bipartisan consensus and national identity in general.

Discourse-bound identity theory is applied in order to link those dimensions, as it posits a collective national identity that is formed via social interaction, creating self-identification of a nation with its shared history and the subsequent differentiation of the internal “self” (or in-group) from the external “other” (or out-group). It is assumed that national identity and foreign policy behaviour are mutually constitutive, with discourse acting as an intermediary form of interaction (Boekle and Nadoll 2003, pp. 159–163; Nadoll 2003, pp. 167–172; Stahl and Harnisch 2009, p. 42). In discourse, national identity elements are (re)produced, interpreted, and argumentatively linked with recommendations for action (Stahl and Harnisch 2009, p. 42). Discourse is contingent, i.e., the stipulation of meaning is only temporary (Nonhoff and Stengel 2014, p. 50), which already implies discursive differences. In Foucault's understanding, these are expressed in discursive formations (DFs; Foucault 1981, p. 58).

Following the social–constructivist school, the theory postulates a world that is socially constructed through interaction, giving discourse a central function in composing the material world. Consequently, it is only through their entry into the discourse that external factors exert their influence over discourse, e.g., by acting as



**Fig. 1** Illustration of the discourse-bound identity theory by Augsten et al. (2022, p. 5), based on (Nadoll 2003, p. 181)

catalysts (Nadoll 2003, p. 179). This also means that whether external shocks become formative events depends on how they are received and portrayed in national (here, within the Republican Party's) discourse (Fig. 1).

Because national identity is composed of various elements, each of which can serve as the ultimate argument in discourse, competing identities are a possibility. This also explains a possible change in a state's foreign policy behaviour (Stahl and Harnisch 2009, pp. 38, 41). Discourse is strongly influenced by the involved persons or institutions (also referred to as relevant discourse participants) whose particular position and interaction with discourse and context shape the discourse's structure. Especially influential discourse participants, with often constitutionally prominent positions, are thereby called "privileged storytellers," according to Milliken (1999, p. 236), which shows that discourse is hierarchical. Following this assumption, the GOP discourse encompasses the standpoints of their members of Congress, but members in prominent positions hold more influence (Carcelli 2022, p. 914).

During the historical construction of identity, different DFs emerge, each linking a certain pattern of argumentation with identity elements and a resulting recommendation for action in foreign policy behaviour. Depending on the interpretation, different arguments and recommendations for action can follow from a single identity element. When one DF dominates or different formations align in their foreign policy recommendations, forming a discursive alliance, this is called discursive hegemony. Attaining such then leads to a certain foreign policy behaviour, from which one can infer change or continuity. The rejection of a policy change not imbedded in identity is then referred to as "contestedness" (Nadoll 2003, p. 171). However, identity change can also occur without a direct change in behaviour, whereupon the change in behaviour usually sets in at a later point in time and thus represents a catch-up change to the widened range for acceptable action (Stahl and Harnisch 2009, p. 47).

Since Republicans currently represent the opposition party in the United States and hold the majority only in the House, not the Senate, their options to actively engage in foreign policy-making are limited. However, congressional approval is needed for most foreign policy acts (especially regarding budgets). Congress can put forward its own bills and block initiatives by the executive, which is happening more frequently due to increased polarisation (Böller 2022b, pp. 676–677; Carcelli 2022, pp. 898–900; Homan and Lantis 2020, p. 2). Thus, an analysis based on GOP discourse in the form of congressional debates, bill proposals, and votes as well as (social media) statements by pertinent Republican lawmakers seems most fruitful to determine the party's stance on the bipartisan consensus and to discern (sustainable) discursive shifts.

In U.S. history, isolationism, internationalism, and realism have established themselves as the three basic directions of foreign policy, generally alternating at intervals of one political generation (Wittkopf et al. 2008, p. 275). Despite obvious differences, all DFs are based on the belief of "American exceptionalism," positing that the United States has the best political system, which is why it should be spread throughout the world. Moreover, while the DFs are separate clusters of arguments, they can form discursive alliances if they favour the same policy recommendations on a specific issue. This means, in actual foreign policy behaviour, isolationism,



internationalism, and realism often occur as a kind of hybrid (Barreto and O'Bryant 2014, pp. 179–180; Cox and Stokes 2012, p. 31).

Isolationism is a policy of nonintervention and isolation from the outside world, often adopted from a position of weakness and thus intended to (re)strengthen one's nation. It is assumed that the liberal system of the United States serves as a “beacon of freedom” (Barreto and O'Bryant 2014, p. 179), serving as a role model that should lead to a passive good influence on other states and thus change them. Isolationism thus stands for the fact that the United States trades and maintains relations with other states but has no official alliances (Kaufman 2013, p. 6, 17). Empirically, isolationism held the discursive hegemony prior to Woodrow Wilson's idealism and ultimately lost its hegemony with the United States's entry to WWII (Dueck 2020, p. 8).<sup>5</sup> In the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, isolationism means minimal U.S. engagement, advocating for no new NATO members or U.S. commitments to the alliance (or even questioning it), as well as opposing sanctions on Russia and aid to Ukraine. Arguments point to high costs and the priority of domestic matters, citing national interest.

In contrast, internationalism and realism are extroverted foreign policies that see the United States as the “leader of the free world” (Barreto and O'Bryant 2014, p. 180). Accordingly, the country has a responsibility as leader in the international system, which entails a projection of their own “exceptionalism.” The goal is considered to be to actively change the world according to the U.S.' own example, which can also be achieved through (military) intervention. These two DFs partly draw on the same identity elements but differ in their recommendations for action. Internationalism, for example, attempts to achieve a liberal world order based on the U.S. system through cooperation and multilateral efforts (Wittkopf et al. 2008, p. 257). It focuses on institution-building in the international system and has been present in U.S. foreign policy since 1919 (Cox and Stokes 2012, p. 34). For the Russia–Ukraine war, this means upholding the liberal international order, supporting NATO as part of said order, viewing Russia as a threat to international order, and viewing Ukraine as defending it and its liberal values. Therefore, recommendations include the promotion of (new) commitments to NATO as well as new members, sanctions on Russia, and military/financial aid to Ukraine.

Realism, in contrast, supports unilateral intervention in international relations and relies on conflict to advance national interests (Wittkopf et al. 2008, p. 258). It stands for unilateral action and reliance on U.S. military supremacy (Cox and Stokes 2012, p. 34). When looking at the historical discourse in the Republican Party, one sees that, overall, this DF has been the most prevalent, but there have been ongoing debates. Colin Dueck (2020) speaks of three different factions within the GOP: *non-intervention*, *hawkish or hardline unilateralism*, and *conservative internationalism*, which correspond to the DFs. They are all based on what he calls “conservative nationalism,” and their interplay has shaped foreign policy thought in the GOP since WWI (Dueck 2020, pp. 2–3). During and after the Cold War, Republican foreign policy discourse was mostly informed by realism. However, the DF was split into

<sup>5</sup> While “isolationism” is most common in the literature, some also use the terms “unilateralist” or “nationalist.”



what is often referred to as conservative realism (e.g., Henry Kissinger's *Realpolitik*) and neoconservatism, which “emphasizes the moral necessity of distinguishing between the forces of good and evil in the international arena, the importance of maintaining U.S. military predominance, a greater willingness to use force, and deep distrust of international law and institutions” (Khong 2008, p. 252). This split can also be observed in the discourse on the Russia–Ukraine war, with conservative realists seeing a “New Cold War” and lapsing into those categories, where Ukraine falls under Russia’s realm of influence and China is the new “actual” adversary to be contained. Thus, proposals include focusing NATO on the Pacific, opposing aid (especially military) to Ukraine, and sanctioning Russia, but doing so in order to serve the United States’ own interest of selling gas. Neoconservatism, on the other hand, wants to uphold U.S. (military) supremacy, which is being contested by Russia’s invasion. Accordingly, Russia should be contained and weakened through sanctions, NATO strengthened (with commitments and new members), and Ukraine supported, as both help in projecting U.S. power.

As is evident from these diverse DFs, there are vastly differing views on foreign policy even within the GOP itself. Accordingly, deviation from or adherence to the bipartisan consensus can be discerned by discourse analysis.

### 3 Discourse Analysis

There is a broad consensus in the literature that Donald Trump markedly deviated from (foreign) policy positions previously prevalent within the Republican Party. While contestations existed before Trump, they were brought to the forefront of the GOP discourse with his presidency (Dück et al. 2020; Ikenberry 2017; Sperling and Webber 2019). Following discourse-bound identity theory, Trump’s diverging behaviour in itself should have had an impact on discourse and national identity, even if it turns out to be an unsustainable foreign policy change not rooted in identity change. This is why Trump’s as well as the GOP’s positions prior to the Russian invasion will be drawn from previous literature and supplemented with primary sources. Both will serve as reference points and will be juxtaposed with the discourse analysis of the Republican Party after February 2022. Considering the focus on the Russia–Ukraine war as a formative event, I will be looking at the aspects of maintaining alliances (i.e., committing to and strengthening NATO) and curbing rivals’ influence (i.e., dealing with Russia’s expansionist behaviour), as well as positions and statements regarding Ukraine (its sovereignty, territorial integrity, financial/military aid, and possible future in NATO, etc.), because while this does not resemble part of the BFPC, it is clearly entwined with constraining Russia.

Regarding the material, the discourse analysis mainly consists of congressional records between February 2022 and June 2023<sup>6</sup> (spanning the 117th and 118th

<sup>6</sup> During this time there were 103 bills introduced containing mentions of NATO, 318 containing mentions of Russia, and 379 containing mentions of Ukraine. This material will be supplemented by anecdotal debates from February 2023 to February 2024 (especially regarding budgetary decisions), as well as statements from the GOP primaries, to find indications regarding the sustainability of discursive hegemony.

Congress), including debates, bills, and votes, supplemented with press releases and remarks in other public forums or (social) media. The congressional debates chosen are taken from congressional records concerning the topics of Ukraine, Russia, and NATO. After a preliminary assessment, the selection of congressional records is centred along “discursive events” (i.e., relevant bill or resolution proposals in Congress). The focus is placed on the first 3 months after the invasion, as this is when the external shock most likely led to reactions, and then on the passing of budgetary bills relating to Ukraine aid, as that proved to be the most contentious subject. To cover the whole scope of GOP discourse, the bill and resolution proposals chosen for this include those later enacted (both with broad and smaller bipartisan support) and those that have not (yet) been passed.<sup>7</sup> In a second step, (social) media remarks were selected through keyword searches<sup>8</sup> on relevant Twitter (now called X) profiles to supplement the parliamentary debates and ensure coverage of the Republican Party's overall discourse. A particular focus is on the GOP leadership as privileged storytellers within the party. Due to the GOP's hierarchical structure, legislators in leadership positions have more influence over congressional agenda-setting and voting behaviour than the average member of Congress and usually represent the mainstream party discourse (Carcelli 2022, p. 914). However, in an increasingly polarised Congress, more radical factions embody a formative power for the overall GOP discourse, often holding the key to attaining a majority (Homan and Lantis 2020, p. 22022). Further, studies have shown that even with growing polarisation in foreign policy debates, partisanship does not necessarily dictate foreign policy decisions in Congress (Bendix and Jeong 2022; Bryan and Tama 2022). Instead, Congress increasingly exercises its “power of the purse” to retain influence over foreign policy (Carcelli 2022, pp. 898–900). And, as Tama (2023, p. 4) points out, there are different forms of bipartisanship, i.e., pro- vs. anti-presidential bipartisanship and cross-partisanship. Therefore, known Trump followers, i.e. politicians who have previously claimed similar positions to him, will also be analysed to represent the whole spectrum of Republican discourse. In this respect, the House Freedom Caucus (HFC) will be specially considered.<sup>9</sup> This will show whether or not the positions by President Trump and his followers are sustainable and whether a new discursive hegemony deviating from the bipartisan consensus holds up. I will infer the existence of discursive hegemony by drawing on votes on congressional bills and resolutions pertaining to NATO and Russia in light of the Russia–Ukraine war.

<sup>7</sup> The selection was conducted using the keywords NATO, Russia, and Ukraine. Further, ten passed bills and resolutions (with high and lower bipartisan support) and six proposed ones were chosen. In chronological order they are as follows: H.Res.956, S.Res.549, H.Res.991, H.Res.831, S.Res.3522, H.Res.7691, H.R.6899, H.Res.7081, H.Res.1130, S.Res.623, H.Res.2617, H.Res.199, H.Res.113, H.Res.488, H.Res.4175, and H.Res.4365. These bill introductions serve as exemplary discursive events for the conducted discourse analysis, as they cover an array of proposed policies.

<sup>8</sup> The same keywords were used.

<sup>9</sup> The House Freedom Caucus was founded before Donald Trump's presidential candidacy, and its roots can be traced back to the Tea Party movement rather than to Trump. However, over the last years it has mostly transformed into an organization furthering the MAGA cause and now features some of Trump's most ardent admirers and followers.

## 4 Discourse on Russia and NATO (Inspired) by Trump—The Reference Point

### 4.1 Discourse on NATO

After WWII, the establishment of continuing alliances was one of the cornerstones of U.S. foreign policy and was unquestioningly shared by all following administrations until President Trump. Here, he shows a transactional view that is unprecedented in postwar America: If an ally were to be attacked, Trump made U.S. assistance contingent on whether the United States would be paid for the protection it would provide (Blake 2016; Ikenberry 2017, p. 5; Sanger and Haberman 2016a). Even though he affirmed his commitment to Article V a month after the initial refusal at NATO headquarters (Herb 2017), this still marks a considerable and unprecedented divergence from the bipartisan consensus. Beyond that, Trump's infamous statement about NATO being "obsolete," made shortly before taking office, shows his doubt regarding the transatlantic alliance's continued right and need to exist (BBC 2017). At one point in time, he even threatened that the United States would leave NATO should the other members not contribute more to shared security (Barnes and Cooper 2019). This was especially unsettling to allies, as it came shortly after Russia's annexation of Crimea, its increased aggressive behaviour in the region, and interference in other states via cyberattacks. Such statements mark a jarring departure from the discursive hegemony on NATO, as "the US has been committed to NATO since the end of the Cold War. Although both internal and external debates or even criticism about U.S. commitment to the Alliance has never stopped, it does not really alter U.S. attitude towards NATO" (Song 2016, pp. 236–237).

There has also been significant criticism of NATO allies by Trump regarding the issue of burden sharing, which is in line with previous discourse, as this has been a sore topic for decades. However, what is new and separates him from his predecessors and others in his party is the connection drawn between burden sharing and America's continued pledge to the alliance. Although there have been instances of widespread criticism of NATO by the United States and attempts to reduce American involvement, never has the actual commitment to the allies and Article V wavered, meaning there was always a general support (Böller 2022a, p. 745, 2023, p. 19; Sperling and Webber 2019). This supports the assumption that President Trump and his followers are pursuing the establishment of a new discursive hegemony that abandons the long-held bipartisan consensus.

However, while it is often said that Trump managed to capture the Republican Party, there were still a number of voices within the GOP that followed a different DF and abode by the bipartisan consensus (especially with regards to their stance on Russia and NATO). While Trump's attempts to improve U.S.–Russian relations did receive backing from former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as a prominent proponent of conservative realism, there was also dissent to be found (Sperling and Webber 2019, p. 512; Steff 2021, pp. 84–87; Tama 2023, pp. 9, 117, 135). Those differing positions within the GOP sometimes even included people from Trump's cabinet, such as Jim Mattis, John Kelly, John Bolton, and Mike Pompeo (Sperling and Webber 2019, p. 514). Consequently, even though many of the party's leaders

fell in line with Trump (on some issues) after initial protests (e.g., Mitch McConnell, Lindsey Graham, and Kevin McCarthy), others suffered consequences for their disagreement (e.g., Liz Cheney and Matt Romney; Smith 2023). This simultaneously shows the fight between different DFs in the GOP and also demonstrates how Trump's positions have steadily permeated the party by drowning or pushing out dissenters, thus striving for discursive hegemony and a change in national identity.

## 4.2 Discourse on Russia

There have been many comments, articles, and analyses observing and reflecting on Trump's admiration of and relation to Russian President Vladimir Putin (see, for example, Dück et al. 2020; Sperling and Webber 2019). He even defended Russia against the U.S. intelligence community's accusation of its interference in the 2016 U.S. elections (Kaufman 2021, p. 28; Tama 2023, p. 134; Trump 2018) and often advocated for closer cooperation with Russia, failing to excoriate or even acknowledge Russian infractions against international law (Dück et al. 2020, p. 291; Sperling and Webber 2019). Although Trump claimed his policy towards Russia to be tougher than that of his predecessors, evidence of this cannot be found in his policies other than his termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty due to Russian infractions (BBC 2019; Kaufman 2021, p. 155). Trump's sympathies regarding Russia and Putin can further be seen when he "conceded that Russia was a threat, but referred to President Putin as a better leader than Barack Obama, and to Moscow's policy of support for the Assad regime in Syria as an effective means of dealing with ISIS" (Sperling and Webber 2019, pp. 522–523).<sup>10</sup>

However, enough GOP members were still in line with the BFPC so that several Republican-led and/or bipartisan bills and resolutions commending Ukraine and condemning Russian troop amassment were introduced and sometimes passed before the Russian invasion (e.g., Cornyn 2022; Durbin 2021; McCaul 2022; Risch 2022; Shaheen 2022). Yet there were members arguing for a more nationalist approach (isolationism) to the looming conflict, introducing legislation prioritizing the U.S.–Mexican border vis-à-vis aid to Ukraine or the trade with natural gas (Cawthorn 2022a; Pfluger 2022; Rubio 2022). Similarly, members of the Republican leadership during and after Trump often sought to curb Russian influence only in the interest of U.S. energy independence and economic primacy, following the conservative realist DF (McCarthy 2021; Scalise 2019, 2020; Stefanik 2021a, b).

Taking all of these statements into account, it is apparent that Donald Trump (and with him a growing part of the GOP) has at least diverged from the bipartisan consensus in regard to NATO and Russia. Further, his continued praise of President Putin and refusal to adopt a more adverse rhetoric are indications of Trump reverting to isolationism, which has spread throughout the party, seeking to attain discursive hegemony. With the GOP leadership often defending the BFPC in this respect, though, fissions within the party are visible, and it is questionable whether a real discursive hegemony of Trump is discernible here. Following the discourse-bound

<sup>10</sup> In contrast, China, with its economic and military rise, is seen as a formidable and problematic rival that should be hindered from expanding its influence.

identity theory, these Isolationist arguments indicate a discursive contestation of the predominant national identity underlying U.S. foreign policy, built on the discursive alliance of the bipartisan consensus.

## 5 GOP Discourse on Russia and NATO After February 2022

### 5.1 Discourse on NATO

The topic of maintaining and strengthening NATO has increased unity among Democrats and Republicans (and also among the alliance's members) following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There were several connected discussions and bills in Congress, often with strong bipartisan support, such as *H.Res.956—Supporting the people of Ukraine*, which reiterates the commitment to NATO. Here, bipartisanship is seen as the obvious response, as openly stated by Representative McCaul (Republican [R]-Texas): “*This is really a historic time, not for only this Nation, but the world, for Ukraine. It is a time when we come together, not as Republicans or Democrats, but as Americans in strong support of the people of Ukraine*” (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022a, pp. 37–38).

After Finland's and Sweden's bids to join NATO, the United States (together with all member states) had to approve their admission. Senate minority leader McConnell (R-Kentucky) led the Republicans' return to the bipartisan consensus on this issue and campaigned strongly for Sweden's and Finland's accession to NATO. Although the bill approving this passed Congress with high support rates of 95–1 in the Senate and 394–18 in the House, there were also voices opposed to this in the GOP (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022j). In the Senate, Senator Paul (R-Kentucky) abstained, whereas Senator Hawley (R-Missouri) voted “no” on the bill. Both senators also published op-eds explaining their decisions, with Hawley saying that curbing Russian influence is not important, and Paul mentioning that new admissions could encroach on Russia's sphere of influence (Hawley 2022; Paul 2022). The 18 House Republicans who voted against accepting Finland and Sweden into NATO again mostly stem from the HFC (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022j, pp. 20–21). In their explanations for their opposition to the new NATO members, they routinely use nationalist arguments along the lines of Trump's views. This shows that arguments from conservative realism and isolationism were used in opposition.

For one, Representative Gaetz (R-Florida) laments that “[g]as is a bazillion dollars ... Inflation is over 9% ... The House is currently voting on how we think other countries should react to our newfound commitment to NATO expansion in Scandinavia. I'm voting NO” (Gaetz 2022c). In doing so, he posits that (domestic) American interests would demand different priorities. Representative Biggs (R-Arizona) then, in a similar fashion, furthered Trump's claims that it would only cost the United States more money to expand the alliance: “*We cannot add Finland and Sweden to NATO. The United States should not expand alliances that will further require us to serve as the military for the world. Virtually all NATO members routinely ignore the required military spending guidelines*” (Biggs 2022b). This alone cannot be counted

as a divergence from the BFPC, since it merely carries the burden-sharing argument forward. However, in March 2022 he went even further when tweeting about his reluctant support for a resolution meant to condemn Russia's attack on Ukraine and express support for Ukraine (*H.Res.956*). In this explanation of his views, he calls into question the appropriateness of a strong commitment to NATO's Article V: "*I condemn Russia's unprovoked attack against Ukraine in the strongest terms. [...] H.Res.956 refers to our 'ironclad commitment' to NATO's Article V, when Congress should be debating each use of military force to determine if it's in our national interest. [...] And it perpetuates a false notion that the U.S. military is the defense force the world [sic]. A better resolution would have expressed support for Ukraine and condemnation for Russia without adding unnecessary and concerning provisions [...]*" (Biggs 2022a). This constitutes a strong departure from the bipartisan consensus and can, therefore, be counted as part of the isolationist DF. Similarly, there is an Instagram post by Representative Cawthorn (R-North Carolina) in which he goes so far as to deny allegiance with NATO, saying, "*I do not stand with Ukraine. I do not stand with Russia. I do not stand with the UN or NATO [...]*" (Cawthorn 2022b). While this is not in connection with the admission of new member states, it also goes against the bipartisan consensus's aspect of maintaining and strengthening alliances.

Even more widespread doubts about the alliance within the Republican Party can be observed when looking at the support for *H.Res.831—Calling on the United States Government to uphold the founding democratic principles of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and establish a Center for Democratic Resilience within the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022d, pp. 23–25). While it was a fairly bipartisan bill, meant to reaffirm the United States's support of NATO and strengthen the shared democratic principles the organisation was founded on, 63 Republican representatives voted against it in April 2022 (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022d, p. 30). It also seems noteworthy that the official HFC X (formerly known as Twitter) account has only one post mentioning NATO since its launch in January 2015, in which a debate on military aid to Ukraine and possible implications for NATO is demanded (House Freedom Caucus 2022).

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that many senior Republicans who have often fallen in line with Trump's positions on other issues during his presidency are strong defenders of NATO and thereby the bipartisan consensus. Examples of this are Senators McConnell and Graham (R-South Carolina), who have been vocal in their support of NATO and Ukraine and also of constraining Russia:

"[...] I have asked the Biden administration early and often to demonstrate America's commitment to our allies and partners most squarely in Russia's crosshairs. Last June, 8 months before the Russian invasion, I urged the President to 'provide serious, lethal support to Ukraine and other vulnerable states on the front lines of Putin's aggressions' [...] In December, I specifically called on President Biden to deploy extra U.S. forces to reinforce NATO's eastern flank. [...] On the campaign trail, President Biden called Putin a 'KGB thug.' He was right about that."—Mitch McConnell (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022b, p. 2)



“[...] The outcome of Ukraine really does matter to the world at large. Senator McCain was known for his support of the transatlantic alliance, a rules-based society, a values-based world, and Putin has put that in jeopardy. [...] I am here to say that victory for Ukraine is victory for America; it is victory for the rule of law; and it is victory for the post–World War II order that has led to historic prosperity.”—Lindsey Graham, ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022b, pp. 17–18)

However, the overall increase in the assigned importance towards the transatlantic alliance and perceived urgency for action seemed to decelerate after the war in Ukraine had gone on for months, and measures to strengthen NATO are not as zealously being put forward. Rather, there are voices increasingly speaking out against a potential future membership of Ukraine (Smith 2023). To summarise, while there is a highly increased general unity on the subject of NATO in the United States, several contestations of this bipartisan consensus aspect can also be found. There is an increase in arguments building on Trump’s previous challenges regarding this topic. Thus, while the GOP in general seems to adhere to steadfastly maintaining alliances, the debates within the party show contestations by a growing number of Republicans—mostly members of the HFC. This points to a small but growing schism within the party and shows a struggle for discursive hegemony within the GOP, with a resurging isolationist DF. With only minor deviations from the BFPC in this regard, the connected national identity seems to be shared widely and appears sustainable, since unanimous support is a rare occurrence in (foreign) policy.

## 5.2 Discourse on Russia

Seeing as Trump did not push for an increase or even continuation of sanctions against Russia after its annexation of Crimea during his presidency, and it was up to Congress to do so (Dück et al. 2020, p. 291; Steff 2021, pp. 84–87; Tama 2023, pp. 116–117, 135), I will now look at his supporters’ views on Russian sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Russia–Ukraine war arguably created a kind of newfound unity in the United States condemning Russia’s actions. There has been a considerable amount of bipartisanship on this issue, which might point to a reorientation towards the bipartisan consensus within the GOP (see also Böller 2022a, 2023; Bryan and Tama 2022; Tama 2023).

The bipartisan initiative to declare Russia a state sponsor of terrorism (*S.Res.623*) was passed unanimously in the Senate in July 2022, but it never entered the House floor (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022k, pp. 113–114). This demonstrates incredible bipartisanship vis-à-vis Russia in the Senate. And, as the bill concerns the executive’s scope of action in dealing with Russia, the lacking vote in the House should not be counted as a contested bipartisan consensus. However, voices in the Republican Party, while condemning Russia’s invasion, also quickly established their view that American interests come first and the United States should not get involved. An example for this is the following X (then known as Twitter) post by Representative Cawthorn on the day of the Russian invasion: “*Under President Trump, we maintained peace through strength with an America First foreign policy. [...] Putin’s*



*invasion of Ukraine is wholly unjustified and dangerous. But America should NOT lurch to war. Our military does not belong to the world. American interests above all*" (Cawthorn 2022d). This shows a strong nationalist conviction and can be seen as an argument attributed to isolationism.

On April 7, two acts regarding sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine were delivered to the House from the Senate—where they had passed 100-0 (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022e, p. 42). This again shows an extraordinary bipartisan consensus in the Senate. In the House, however, a small number of Representatives voted against them. *H.R. 7108—An act to suspend normal trade relations treatment for the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus* also had been stalled in the Senate for 3 weeks prior to this, due to concerns of several Republicans in connection to the broadening of the Magnitsky Act (DeBonis 2022). The three GOP House members who voted against this legislation then listed similar arguments, fearing an increase of President Biden's power to bring sanctions against actors for human rights violations (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022e, pp. 21–22). This shows that the deviating votes stemmed from a systemic conflict between the executive and legislative branches and did not constitute a contestation of the BFPC. The case is slightly different for the second act passed that day: *H.R.6968—An act to prohibit the importation of energy products of the Russian Federation, and for other purposes*. Here, nine Representatives voted against its passing, including two Democrats (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022e, pp. 22–23). The Republicans' arguments against these sanctions represent a nationalist view mostly concerned with rising fuel prices. For example, Representative Gaetz (R-Florida) argued that "[...] it has become increasingly clear over the past several weeks that sanctions have not deterred bad Russian behavior. They have, however, contributed to rising fuel prices and inflation, which are continuing to crush my fellow Northwest Floridians. The Biden Administration has no plan to deal with the consequences of these sanctions at home [...]" (Gaetz 2022a). Thus, the reasons for opposing the sanctions can be subsumed under isolationism, breaking with the BFPC of curbing Russia's influence. Two other bills were passed by the House in May 2022, dealing with sanctions on Russian government officials and prohibiting certain financial transactions with Russia and Belarus. Both received two "no" votes—from Representatives Greene (R-Georgia) and Massie (R-Kentucky), who are members of the HFC (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022h, pp. 39–40).

Thus, while the act of voting against the sanctions deviates from the bipartisan consensus, only a minuscule number of Republicans does so. The isolationist DF is clearly in the minority. This all points to a rather intact BFPC (and its discursive hegemony) regarding sanctions on Russia, which is also in line with previous literature on the issue (e.g., Böller 2023; Tama 2023).

Now a look at the other side of the coin: supporting Ukraine, which can indirectly impede Russia. Again, there were several votes against acts aimed at providing Ukraine with humanitarian, financial, and military aid. Senator Paul stalled fast-tracking of assistance in May 2022. In an op-ed, he explained that the United States should not take Ukraine as an ally or aid them against Russia, but rather that Ukraine should assume neutrality. For him, it is a question of respecting the spheres of influence of great powers and to then use this offer for diplomatic negotiations with

Russia (Paul 2022). This leaves the realm of the BFPC and is in line with conservative realism. *H.Res.7691—Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act* still passed the House and Senate with unusually high bipartisan support for budgetary legislation (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022g, i). Senator Grassley (R-Iowa), while endorsing the bill, criticised President Biden's hesitation regarding Russia as well as insufficient border security, showcasing the neoconservative DF (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022i, p. 41).

In the House of Representatives, there were even more Republican voices against aid. When Congress voted on the fiscal year's budget—including financial aid for Ukraine—in March 2022, the HFC demanded to debate the Ukraine budget separately. While they asked the Republican Party to change appropriations measures in several points, they especially focused on extracting aid to Ukraine from the overall bill to debate on it extensively, as can be seen by their proposed separate bill on aid for Ukraine (Scott 2022). House Freedom Caucus member Representative Roy (R-Texas) made this clear on X (then known as Twitter) by stating, “[...] *Rep Roy is proud to join this @freedomcaucus effort to demand Congress: (1) Vote and DEBATE Ukraine \$ SEPARATELY [...]*” (Roy 2022). Such a measure would not only stall the actions by prolonging the process, but the intent of debating on the aid also suggests its probable reduction. This is especially likely in light of the HFC's extensive fiscal conservativeness and nationalistic standpoints (even compared to the general Republican Party; Desilver 2023). Additionally, there were several comments by HFC members supporting this assumption. For example, Representative Jordan (R-Ohio) tweeted, “*More money for Ukraine while baby formula is out of stock for Americans? Voted No. [...]*” (Jordan 2022), and Matt Gaetz demanded “*No more BILLIONS for Ukraine!*” (Gaetz 2022b). Cawthorn called high financial aid to Ukraine (and other countries in general) into question in a similar fashion, saying, “*Imagine how the United States would thrive if the government spent OUR resources on the American people instead of sending BILLIONS of OUR money to other countries*” (Cawthorn 2022c). Gaetz also spoke out against what he calls a “*dangerous bipartisan consensus on Ukraine*,” criticising high financial aid to Ukraine in Congressional debates: “*Last night, this House approved \$ 40 billion for Ukraine as American families go without baby formula. To put that in context, Biden's budget calls for \$ 15.3 billion for Customs and Border Protection, so apparently, Ukraine is more than twice as important as our homeland*” (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022h, p. 8). However, the HFC's letter to the Republican leadership also states support for a ban on Russian oil and gas, citing energy independence as their goal (Roy 2022). Thus, there are again strong nationalist arguments visible in the discourse that represent isolationism, as some of their policy recommendations deviate from the bipartisan consensus. The stance on sanctions for Russia, however, resembles conservative realism, showing the emergent discursive alliance between the two DFs.

In connection to this, we can also find instances where bigger parts of the Republican Party disagree with the aid provided to Ukraine against Russia. There is, for example, *H.Res.7081—Ukraine comprehensive debt payment relief act of 2022*, which was also passed by the House in May 2022 but received 56 “no” votes—all from GOP members (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022h, pp. 38–39). This indicates a greater schism within the GOP concerning how far the United States

should go in impeding Russia and, thus, questioning their overall adherence to the BFPC. The congressional resolution draft on ending all military and financial aid to Ukraine that was initiated by Gaetz with several other HFC members and introduced to the House in February 2023 is also in line with this rationale (U.S. House of Representatives 2023). Concerning the status of Crimea, Gaetz commented that he would “*rather go to war to protect Monarch Butterfly habitat than to decipher which dude in a track suit gets to rule Crimea.*” His reasoning for this was that “[t]he case for America’s interest is far more clear with the butterfly” (Gaetz 2022d). Moreover, some even questioned the reputation of the Ukrainian rather than the Russian government, such as Cawthorn, who stated, “*Remember that Zelensky is a thug [...] [r]emember that the Ukrainian government is incredibly corrupt and it is incredibly evil and it has been pushing woke ideologies*” (Cawthorn cited in Rogers 2022). Such statements do not work towards curbing Russian influence and could, thus, be viewed as a departure from the bipartisan consensus. While Cawthorn’s point is unclear, Gaetz’s statement undoubtedly falls into the isolationist DF.

Additionally, the passing of *H.Res.2617—Consolidated Appropriations Act* was stalled and reformulated several times before being passed by Congress in December 2022—partly due to the funds for Ukraine aid it contains (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022i, m). Since the bill incorporates numerous legislations, this in itself cannot be seen as a contestation of the BFPC. However, the aid for Ukraine is mentioned as the first reason for opposition during the debate by Representative and member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Burchett (R-Tennessee): “*I rise in strong opposition to H.R. 2617. [...] What are we spending Americans’ hard-earned money on[,] you ask, Mr. Speaker? [...] Over \$ 45 billion for Ukraine, when Europe should be carrying the burden of these costs. That is \$100 billion total. [...] That works out to about \$200 million per congressional district, Mr. Speaker. I wonder what we could have spent that on back in east Tennessee*” (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022m, p. 3). This, again, reflects the isolationist DF.

However, one needs to recall here that large parts of the Republican party—especially in the Senate—are in support of aiding Ukraine against Russia. This can be seen not only from the highly bipartisan votes but also from resolutions introduced to the Senate by GOP members, such as the *S.Res.549—Supporting the transfer of aircraft and air defense systems to the armed forces of Ukraine*, which was introduced by Senator Graham and cosponsored by 11 Republican senators, as well as *H.Res.991*, introduced by Representative Cole (R-Oklahoma) with 20 Republican cosponsors and demanding similar actions (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022b, p. 35, 2022c, p. 49). Both resolutions contain arguments belonging to the neoconservative DF and uphold the BFPC. Similarly, *S.Res.3522—Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022*, which had been introduced by Senator Cornyn (R-Texas) in January 2022, passed Congress in April with overwhelming bipartisan support. There were several speeches by GOP legislators in its support, though Representative Reschenthaler (R-Pennsylvania) still uses nationalistic arguments when he brings up competing domestic issues: “[...] while I support S. 3522 and, of course, the people of Ukraine, I believe this is a missed opportunity to help the American people [...]” (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2022f, p. 11). So, overall neoconservatism is mixed with isolationist language.

While we can observe an overall return to the bipartisan consensus and general bipartisanship on the issue of curbing Russia's influence in the first few months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there seems to be a growing fatigue—especially regarding financial and military aid to Ukraine. This phenomenon was displayed prominently at the Conservative Political Action Conference that took place in March 2023. There, many of the prominent speakers (notably, Trump himself, Greene, Gaetz, Steve Bannon, and Governor DeSantis [R-Florida]) spoke out against continued aid for Ukraine, while others known for their previous support of the BFPC in these instances (e.g., Mike Pompeo and Nikki Haley) simply avoided the subject (Smith 2023). It is also noteworthy that House Speaker McCarthy was able to be elected as such by the GOP in January 2023 only after he made concessions to members of the HFC, including “that Republicans will not write a ‘blank cheque’ for Ukraine” (Smith 2023), which shows the factions' growing influence on the party. During the Republican primaries, Vivek Ramaswamy even suggested, “*Hunter Biden got a \$5 million bribe from Ukraine, that's why we're sending \$200 billion back to that same country*” (Allen 2023). Additionally, Nikki Haley was the only aspirant in the primaries arguing for continued significant support for Ukraine. Further indication of a persistent but waning bipartisan consensus is *H.Res.8035—Ukraine Security Supplemental Appropriations Act*, which was passed by the House in April 2024 (311–112), with the Republican Party split in half regarding support and opposition (U.S. Government Publishing Office 2024, pp. 60–61).

Thus, the subjects of Russia and Ukraine (and, in very small parts, NATO) reveal a division of the conservative realist DF. It is now split among two competing discursive alliances: the bipartisan consensus (BFPC) also shared by the internationalist DF vs. Trump's diverging arguments also shared by the isolationist DF, which can be summarised as “America First.” This shows increasing contestation of the bipartisan consensus and points to a growing struggle for discursive hegemony between BFPC and America First. Further, while the struggle can be partly ascribed to partisan politics, many of the arguments used point to a contestation of national identity within the GOP.

## 6 Conclusion

To conclude, a (re)strengthened bipartisan consensus can be found in the discourse on Russia due to an increased unity after the invasion. Only a few voices in the GOP deviate from this, and even then, their arguments do not always follow Trump's positions but cite other unrelated objections and resemble the isolationist and conservative realist DFs. Whether this unity is actually due to the external shock of the Russia–Ukraine war is hard to discern and will probably be revealed only over time, especially with the elections in 2024. Further, maintaining alliances in the form of support for NATO has seemed to receive even less contestation in the Republican Party after February 2022. These two issues are, therefore, indicative of a stable shared identity, and the bipartisan consensus has (so far) proved to be quite sustainable, at times even invigorated in the wake of the Russian invasion.

The discourse regarding aid for Ukraine, however, displays an increasing amount of contestation of the BFPC, with arguments from isolationism and conservative realism. It is notable that the BFPC is mostly contested by rank-and-file GOP members rather than by those in official party positions. Since some of the deviation can be explained by partisan politics and struggle for influence between the branches, the discursive hegemony of the bipartisan consensus appears to be intact, but its sustainability is contested by a new discursive alliance. Such a growing intraparty split between two discursive alliances (BFPC vs. America First) shows the increasing intensity of their struggle for discursive hegemony. The further development of these discursive alliances (and especially the alignment of conservative realism) will reveal the magnitude of the intraparty schism and the interconnected identity crisis of the Republican Party. As such, the stance on impeding Russia and supporting Ukraine in this war has emerged as a divisive issue for the Republican primaries for the 2024 presidential election, and there will be a continued struggle for hegemony between the DFs on this. The future evolution of the GOP discourse is, thus, dependent on the next elections and—in connection to this—on the development of the HFC's influence on the party, i.e., whether its members attain prominent party positions. Hence, more research of the GOP discourse on these issues is needed, specifically concerning the development of national identity and the impact of the 2024 elections, to determine the sustainability of discursive hegemony more conclusively. So far, it seems as if the GOP does indeed fall back into its previous BFPC hegemony and, thus, resembles a Manchurian candidate recovering from its brainwashing regarding Russia. The identity crisis visible within the Republican Party does seem to mirror the overall polarisation in the United States.

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