

Alberto Ghibellini

Editor's Preface



It is proper for more than one reason that after focusing on Russia and Europe in Issues No. 13 and 14 respectively, we now devote this section of Issue No. 15 to the United States of America. The US is a player of paramount importance in world politics, still regarded by many as the only remaining “superpower” were it not for the recent economic and geopolitical rise of China. For us Europeans, the US is still a crucial military ally, due to Europe’s characteristic weakness and reluctance to take responsibility with regard to its security. Needless to say, it is a commercial partner of primary importance. Last but not least – despite its shortcomings and contradictions in the post-war era – the US is the country, along with Great Britain, to which the so-called “free world” owes the most for its cherished freedom and liberal democratic institutions, given its victory over the 20th century totalitarian regimes and its role as the leader of western democracies during that time and beyond.

It is in this latter regard, however, that a fundamental question arises: in recent years, such a leadership appears to have declined. From the unilateral campaigns of the “war on terror” in the Middle East, to the more recent restatement of the “America first” principle and fluctuating stance towards NATO and other international agreements, the US has given the impression to be no longer willing, or able, to keep its role as the leader of liberal democracies worldwide. In addition, the recent developments of its internal political and social landscape, characterized by a sharp rise in polarization, unrest, and demagoguery, have made many observers feel that the US’s

commitment to liberal democracy might have suddenly become less unflinching than it was thought to be.

All these worries (or hopes, depending on the political and ideological standpoint of the observer) materialized, as it were, on January 6, 2021, when a mob of supporters, incited by the outgoing President Donald Trump, stormed the Capitol – the heart and symbol of the US democratic institutions – trying to prevent the certification of the election of the new President Joe Biden. This unprecedented and disturbing event has not only shocked the public opinion of the democratic world, but has also laid bare the depth of the current political and social crisis of the US and the urgency of a thorough analysis thereof.

The following essays are meant as a step in that direction. We have gathered these contributions in order to provide our readership with suggestions for further reflection on questions that are still unfolding and whose reach and impact are yet to be properly gauged. In the awareness that a fair assessment and a meaningful debate can only result from the discussion of a plurality of viewpoints, we have solicited contributions from authors with different backgrounds and leanings. Of course, the points they make may be received with a variable degree of acceptance and support depending on the readers' views. We are, however, confident that, both individually and as a whole, the following essays will not fail to be informative, stimulating and thought-provoking.

I wish to express my gratitude to the four authors we have invited for kindly accepting to contribute their essays. Special thanks go to Lynn Phalen for her suggestions on various aspects of this section and to Giovanni Giorgini for his comments on my essay. Lastly, I am grateful to Harvey Mansfield for his advice concerning the section title.