

Andrew Carnegie Distinguished Lecture on Conflict Prevention
in Honor of David Hamburg

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Distinguished members and guests of the Foreign Policy Association: I am grateful to have this opportunity to deliver the Andrew Carnegie Distinguished Lecture on Conflict Prevention and to honor my good friend David Hamburg. The Carnegie Corporation, under the leadership of Vartan Gregorian, continues to represent the gold standard in philanthropic endeavor. Carnegie's cutting edge achievements benefitting education, global peace, the quality of our democracy, and numerous other areas are a model for how a grant-making organization can contribute to the well-being of society. We need this work now more than ever, and I am confident that Carnegie will continue to provide vital leadership.

It is a wonderful privilege to deliver a lecture in honor of David Hamburg. He has been an important influence on many of us in this room and his devotion to conflict prevention and global peace is unsurpassed. There are many stories attesting to David's vision and commitment. Among the most important is his leadership during the critical days when the Soviet Union was collapsing. His work at Carnegie undergirded the legislative efforts of Senator Sam Nunn and myself to find a solution to the problem of the vulnerability of the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons. We leaned heavily on a report commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation and co-authored by Ash Carter that provided overwhelming evidence that immediate action by the United States was required to prevent a potential nuclear catastrophe. Without that evidence, it would have been very difficult to convince a skeptical Congress to go along with the idea of providing American assistance to guard and destroy weapons and materials in the former Soviet Union. The Nunn-Lugar program was not just a bill. It was a process that required constant oversight and reinvigoration lasting more than two decades. Throughout that period, we could always count on the support and encouragement of David Hamburg.

Our discussion today, appropriately, is centered on conflict prevention. Under normal circumstances, I might address such topics as the Middle East peace process, the need to secure weapons of mass destruction, the fate of the Iran nuclear agreement, or relations with Russia and China. But at the beginning of a new Presidential administration in Washington, we face an even more fundamental dilemma for conflict prevention. This is whether the United States will continue to provide comprehensive leadership in a dangerous world.

Since World War II, the most essential factor in preventing conflict has been U.S. leadership. We may have made some mistakes during that time, but the overarching effect of America's commitment to global order has been the growth of international norms and institutions that have checked conflict, promoted human rights, and expanded stability. We see this most clearly in Europe, a continent wracked by deadly conflict for centuries. With the benefit of a U.S.-led alliance and security guarantees, Europe has maintained peace in most corners of the continent for the last 70 years.

For decades, both Democrat and Republican presidents have embraced American global leadership. It is early in the Trump presidency. But the President and many of his aides have been outspoken in their skepticism or even disdain for continuing America's global role. It is my contention today that if strong and comprehensive American leadership is withdrawn from the global stage, broader efforts at conflict prevention will fail. The people of the United States and most countries of the world will become poorer and will have to endure more frequent conflict. Solutions to threats that impact us all, including climate change, extreme poverty and hunger, communicable diseases, nuclear proliferation, cyberwarfare, and terrorism will be almost impossible to solve.

I always have tried to act on the principle that we have one President at a time. For the United States to reach its potential in security and prosperity, President Trump must succeed on the world stage. Although I am a Republican, I believe that both Republican and Democrat Presidents can succeed, and I have attempted to help both during my career, as many of you have. I am one who considers it irresponsible to simply outwait a President with whom you disagree, especially where foreign policy is concerned. Too much can happen in four years, or even in one year. It is up to all of us to try to move policy in directions that will benefit the United States, prevent conflict, and uphold fundamental moral values.

I am sure that President Trump wants to succeed and that he is learning on the job how our government functions, what powers the President can and cannot exercise, and how he can interact with the rest of the U.S. government. He is also having his first experiences with international politics.

A good bit of the critical commentary surrounding Trump Administration foreign policy has been centered on statements and actions by the President that appear to have been poorly vetted. These include an off-the-cuff remark opening the possibility of rejecting the two-state formula for a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, a needlessly contentious conversation with the Australian prime minister, and an unsuccessful attempt to pressure China by suggesting that the U.S. might rethink the one-China policy.

These episodes are indicative of a President who has just started to get his foreign policy team in place and has not yet found his footing. Though such missteps come with costs, we should see them in a long-range context and have some optimism that time and better staffing will smooth out some of the Administration's rougher edges.

What worries me far more than these missteps are the Administration's deliberate foreign policy choices. The Trump Administration has criticized "globalism" and stated its intent to downsize American involvement and leadership in the world. This intent is reflected in the President's proposed budget. One of the ironies of this is that a President who campaigned on his ability to achieve grandiose results is offering a vision that is so lacking in ambition and so devoid of American heroism. So far, Trump foreign policy has been an outgrowth of the 2016 Trump political campaign, rather than a sober assessment of global conditions and U.S. interests.

We elect Administrations, not just to execute policies that have political momentum. We also expect them to construct a strategic vision that attempts to integrate all levers of American power. We expect them to play geopolitical offense, not just hunker down in a defensive posture.

Many of the Trump Administration's foreign policy goals are simplistic, prosaic, and reactive. These include building a wall to seal our southern border, extracting more contributions from fellow alliance members, seeking concessions from longstanding trade partners, ejecting as many undocumented immigrants as possible, and cutting the State Department budget by almost a third. Taken together, these policies do nothing to enhance American productivity or competitiveness at home or influence overseas. These are goals that normally would be associated with a selfish, inward looking nation that is being motivated by fear, not a great superpower with the capacity to shape global affairs.

What the President will learn in time is that geopolitical power is not primarily about deal-making or even decision-making. It has much more to do with building and maintaining leverage that can be brought to bear both in times of crisis and in the normal course of international operations. American leverage comes from numerous sources, not just military power. It comes from strong alliances and trade relationships. It comes from global leadership within international institutions. It comes from robust diplomatic capabilities. And it comes from the respect and confidence that other governments and peoples have in the historic leadership role of the United States.

President Trump has experimented with military power, especially in the recent strikes against Syrian targets. This action reversed pronouncements he made as a candidate that military involvement in Syria would be a mistake. His budget also proposed large increases in military spending, even as other national security accounts were targeted for cuts. It is too early to fully judge the military policies of the Administration or the efficacy of its military actions in Syria. But the President must understand that military power cannot substitute for other forms of leverage. The events of this century should make it abundantly clear that the military instrument – though essential – is difficult to use. Military force can be incredibly expensive in lives and treasure and often is accompanied by moral dilemmas. It almost always elicits a response from enemies, sometimes through disproportionate warfare. A strong, well-funded military remains as important as ever in deterring aggression and addressing threats that cannot be solved in any other way. But we cannot bomb our way to security.

Unfortunately the first three months of the Trump Presidency have been an exercise in squandering America's international leverage in favor of campaign-driven foreign policy themes that are fundamentally contradicted by centuries of world history. The President is choosing to wager American prosperity and security on the discredited panaceas that industry growth can be ignited by greater protections from global trade, that American jobs can be preserved by building a border wall and deporting immigrants, and that American security can best be protected by downsizing the U.S. role in the world. The President has rightly worried about how we compete with China, for example. But he has blithely rejected our most potent leverage in that competition – the Trans Pacific Partnership Treaty.

In each of these areas – trade, immigration, and alliances – the common theme voiced by the Administration is that our country has been exploited by malevolent foreign forces and complicit American leaders. This has a strong appeal to some Americans who feel displaced by global competition or threatened by immigrants. But over time, the net effect of actually following through on all of this would be an economic and geopolitical disaster.

In the contemporary context, global trade is unsettling to many Americans. But trade is essential to any economy. It expands choices for consumers, holds down inflation, gives businesses the widest possible markets, stimulates innovation, and promotes economic growth.

We know that the most powerful force in the dislocation of American manufacturing is automation and the advancement of technology, especially information technology. These efficiencies have made our workers far more productive than they were at the beginning of this century. When industries produce more with less labor, workers lose jobs. The main challenge in responding to these economic dislocations is improving the business environment and finding ways to retrain workers and connect them to new jobs, often in different locations. This is a hard process, but it is not impossible. We doom our nation's workforce to a dismal future if we shift the blame to trade and immigrants, instead of attacking the real challenge. We also know that attempting to isolate a nation from trade competition is a self-defeating strategy that will hurt those at the bottom of the economic ladder before anyone else.

On immigration, we are mired in a debate of distraction. The issue is not whether our nation could expand resources and embrace efficiencies that might improve border security. That is a reasonable goal that might be achieved in a number of ways. The problem is that the methods selected by the Trump Administration have been designed for ostentatious symbolism rather than for maximizing U.S. security. Building a border wall and issuing an executive order to ban entrants from certain Muslim countries waste both American resources and international good will. This is not to say that some malefactors might not be prevented from entering the country by a wall or a ban. But there are more cost-efficient and effective ways of going about this work that would not alienate global public opinion, poison good relations with Mexico, and hand a recruitment tool to terrorists.

In a world where dampening the rise of new terrorists is as important as dealing with existing ones, the ban on entrants from Muslim countries represents the most obvious recruitment tool against the United States since Abu Ghraib. We know the commitment of the American people and the strength of our Constitution in protecting freedom of religion. But a ban of this type, especially accompanied by the Trump campaign's history of anti-Islamic rhetoric, gives verbal ammunition to any terrorist leader who seeks to focus followers on the United States. It also makes it more difficult to recruit allies, translators, sources of human intelligence, and other help that we need in Muslim countries around the globe. The ban has been a steep net loss to U.S. national security. Carrying out such a policy indicates either that the Administration has subordinated U.S. security to domestic political considerations or it has an extremely unsophisticated understanding of the power of international propaganda.

The cause of improving border enforcement is rational. But focusing these efforts so heavily on a wall, while proposing large cuts in the Coast Guard and State Department budgets

bespeaks a similar misunderstanding of relative risk. Advisors have failed to make clear to the President that the State Department and the Coast Guard are among the most important agencies in combating the entry of terrorists and drugs into the United States. That is a rather fundamental point to miss in such an important debate. But, of course, neither of those agencies has the symbolic lure of a massive construction project on our southern border.

Regrettably, the sound and fury over immigration symbolism neglects a reasoned debate on immigration that might generate a consensus political solution. As I have observed in the past, immigration is an issue that is conducive to a workable compromise that strengthens enforcement, improves our relationship with Mexico, ensures access to job-creating high-skilled labor, captures more taxes, and deals humanely with millions of undocumented immigrants. The details of an immigration compromise are well understood. This is a political problem, not a technical one.

Finally, as with immigration and trade, the Trump Administration's early policies toward allies threaten to shed leverage that we will need to address crises in the future. It is fair for the President to seek greater contributions from our alliance partners. All recent Presidents have done that. But the Administration has to recognize that it cannot allow any doubts in the minds of our adversaries about U.S. commitment to our allies. Such ambiguity is not clever. It is dangerous and can lead to deadly miscalculation.

This is especially true in Eastern Europe where we have witnessed recent examples of Russian aggression near the NATO alliance. Our government should make very clear that the United States will honor our NATO Article V commitments under all circumstances. The positions of the United States of America and the statements of the President are a vital part of the baseline of global order.

Any nation, including the United States, must pursue its self-interest. Nations, at their core, are not altruistic enterprises. They exist to promote the security and prosperity of their citizens. The irony is that the nations that succeed the most at self-interested goals have always been the ones that respect broader ideals of human freedom, justice for the individual, and rule of law. Those nations that do not aspire to a higher ideal lose their claim to greatness. The United States of America has been a powerful nation. But more importantly, it has been a heroic nation.

Our greatest moments – the moments that have defined national character and propelled our society forward -- have been those when we have sacrificed something for more than just self-interest. The most compelling examples of heroism by American leaders have several important things in common. They have been directed outward, rejecting self-aggrandizement. They have looked to the future, as opposed to attempting to recapture the past. They have been absent bravado, declining to press advantages that they might have taken. And frequently, they have been self-sacrificial.

We think of George Washington carefully setting precedent after precedent that would assure that the power of the Presidency was constrained. We think of Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox foregoing the vengeance of a victor and Robert E. Lee, the rebel, rejecting the option of guerrilla war and urging his soldiers to go home and be good citizens. We think of

Abraham Lincoln at the Second inaugural, urging reconciliation, when many advisors wanted retribution. We think of Franklin Roosevelt embracing the global burden of defeating Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. We think of Dwight Eisenhower's painstaking efforts to hold the Western alliance together to win the war in Europe and set the stage for the post-World War II order. We think of generations of leaders who sacrificed body and mind in the struggle for civil rights from Frederick Douglas and Harriet Tubman to Dr. Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks and many, like John Lewis, who are still working today. We think of thousands of risk takers in science and industry from John Glenn and Neil Armstrong to Jonas Salk and Norman Borlaug who pioneered amazing discoveries that expanded human knowledge or saved millions of lives.

Our country, too, has been heroic. More than any other nation, the United States possesses a traditional moral identity. That identity is closely associated with religious tolerance, democratic governance, freedom of the individual, the promotion of economic opportunity, and resistance to oppression. This set of ideals was espoused in our founding documents and reaffirmed through the sacrifices of our own Civil War. It was amplified during two World Wars in which the United States opposed the forces of aggression and conquest. And it was reinvigorated through the struggle of our civil rights movement.

The United States has been and still is a force for good in the world. I believe this is indisputable from any objective point of view. In most respects, we have been an incredibly generous nation. We have helped to rehabilitate enemies like Germany and Japan, and we initiated co-operative threat reduction to help the former Soviet Union protect and destroy the very nuclear arsenal that was once pointed at us. We have helped countries such as South Korea move from extreme poverty to impressive prosperity through our assistance and protection. Americans lead the world's fight against AIDS and hunger. The United States is also the undisputed leader in disaster assistance.

Our armed forces, by their mere presence, have deterred major wars and minor conflicts. Our Navy has been the principle force for maintaining order on the high seas. Our democratic institutions and political and social freedoms have been models for the world, and we have actively helped to nurture democracy in numerous nations. Many Americans do not fully appreciate the international impact of the example set by our transparent political debate and the extraordinary degree of self-examination that accompanies American policy decisions.

I would contend that our leverage in global affairs, and therefore our own security, is intimately connected to this heroic tradition. But it has to be maintained. Once it is gone, it is very difficult to retrieve. Other power structures will occupy the void, and many of them are not sympathetic to American values and interests. We are already seeing clear actions by China, for example, to enhance its trade and foreign assistance relationships in Asia as neighboring countries deal with doubts about the Trump Administration's willingness to stay fully involved in the region. China also is attempting to position itself as a leader on climate change to take advantage of a declining American role.

I remain optimistic about our country's future as a global leader. Our institutions are very strong and grounded in a resilient Constitution. I believe that that the American people are proud of the historic leadership role of our country and recognize that it is indivisible from our own

security. All of us must continue to make these points in public debate and continue to have confidence that the coming century will be one of American heroism and achievement.

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