

LECTURE

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President Donald Trump and the New International Order

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Abstract: *Donald Trump is an unconventional President, but we live in unconventional times. The liberal international order, in Trump's view, cannot mean blind adherence to the old way of doing things including interference in all of the world's crises and international nation-building. He has said that a strong America understands that "caution and restraint are really true signs of strength" and that America, our allies, and world peace are best served by a "disciplined, deliberate and consistent foreign policy." Donald Trump—the disrupter, the big thinker, the unconventional, the Tweeting President—may be outrageously unconventional in how he communicates his current thinking, but he knows that he is in a tough fight with those who are determined to undermine his agenda.*

I am honored by my longtime friends Chung Mong Joon and Hahm Chaibong at the Asan Institute to be given this opportunity to address our theme. My perspective, perhaps unusual to many of you, will be in defense of Donald Trump.

First, my operating assumption: For Donald Trump, and in my opinion, America's foreign policy is based on protecting and advancing the interests of the American people. This is what I define as an "America First" foreign policy—and I remind you that, as President Trump has said on a number of occasions, an "America First" foreign policy does not mean an "America Only" foreign policy.

We all recognize that America has a geographic advantage not afforded to many of our Allies:

- South Korea, our host country here, confronts a hostile, alien regime on its immediate border, a competitive expansionist regime across the sea to the west, and a former occupying power to the east;

KEY POINTS

- For Donald Trump, America's foreign policy is based on protecting and advancing the interests of the American people.
- As President Trump has said, however, "America First" does not mean "America Only."
- The Trump Administration seeks to work toward an open and free society because most Americans seek expanded individual freedom and opportunity under the rule of law, and freedom enables each individual to make choices on her or his own.
- The liberal international order, in Donald Trump's view, cannot mean a blind adherence to the old way of doing things including interference in all of the world's crises and international nation-building. America, our allies, and world peace are best served by a "disciplined, deliberate and consistent foreign policy."
- Trumpism is wholly compatible with democracy in the American tradition. Only someone from outside the political system could be making the necessary fundamental changes to update how we do business.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/hl1287>

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- Japan has unresolved rival territorial claims with Russia, a competitive relationship with China, and North Korea lobbing missiles across its territory;
- Taiwan, not always mentioned in this context, has a close bilateral relationship with the United States, punches above its weight in international economic matters, but still faces formidable challenges from the PRC;
- Our friends in Europe live in the shadow of a resurgent Russia; and
- Our allies in the Middle East—Muslim, Christian and Jew—confront a complex set of prospective and real adversaries, all in close proximity to each other.

America, the largest economy and the predominant military power in the world, has the advantage of a peaceful neighborhood and the opportunity to “pick and choose” the places where it might forward deploy its military assets in its own national interest and the interest of its own people. Therefore, I believe that a President who proclaims “an America First policy” fits our needs and our understanding of both who and where we are.

This is a definition of the Trump-revised liberal international order, circa 2018, or what I call the “new international order.” It is an “America First foreign policy,” Trump style. Please accept that definition for at least the duration of my remarks.

A President who proclaims “an America First policy” fits our needs and our understanding of both who and where we are.

My second definition is that the Trump Administration seeks to work toward an open and free society because most Americans seek expanded individual freedom and opportunity under the rule of law. And we seek freedom because freedom enables each individual to make choices on her or his own.

“Trumpism” is one of two polar opposite versions of today’s American populism. It is a populism of the right based on the Tea Party movement and now represented politically by Donald Trump. The

alternative version of populism is the Occupy Movement (as in “Occupy Wall Street”) version of populism and represented politically by Bernie Sanders on the left.

How did we get here?

In 1987, more than 30 years ago, Donald Trump wrote his first book, *The Art of the Deal*. In August 2016, he invited me to serve in a senior slot on his presidential transition team. This was several months before the presidential election and at a time when the overwhelming political consensus was that Hillary Clinton would be the next President of the United States.

I accepted candidate Trump’s invitation and reread my copy of *The Art of the Deal* carefully. I found some relevant arguments regarding President Trump’s conduct.

Five Tenets of Trumpism

Thinking Big. Trump the dealmaker said, “If you are going to think anyway, you might as well think big.” Well, running for President of the United States is certainly a big thought.

Expanding the Debate. Another Trump dictum in the book was his view that when you think big, go into negotiations (or even discussions) and become a disrupter. Come up with new ideas that are so far outside the conventional boundaries of what is considered possible that you are effectively changing not only the debate, but the whole framework—the whole range of options—within the debate.

What Donald Trump the disrupter does is expand that field of debate so that the margins move significantly beyond the way a question is conventionally considered, either in Washington among the think tankers and the politicians or around the world by both our friends and our adversaries.

Let me give you an example of an international encounter where Donald Trump thinks outside the box. I will leave it to others, including the left-wing *Atlantic* magazine, to give Donald Trump credit for getting Kim Jong-un to participate in the forthcoming summits as it recently did. Instead, let me give you an “out of area” example that is revealing.

During the presidential campaign, on a number of occasions, candidate Donald Trump said, “NATO may be obsolete. Members are not meeting their spending commitments. They have to pay up.” Every time he said it, the political establishment of both parties in the United States and all of Europe told us that it was an outrage that he would talk that way.

At least most of the political establishment: At that time, several months before the election, former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who also served as the American Ambassador to NATO, said to me, “Ed, I don’t understand it. When I was Ambassador to NATO and then when I was at DOD, I would go around giving dinner speeches saying that Europe had to spend more on NATO, and all I did was put everyone to sleep. Trump says the exact same thing and everyone is outraged and dumps on him.”

Now, 18 months later, a new report from NATO states that in 2017, the first year of Trump’s Administration, “NATO members increased their military spending by a net 5%.” The NATO report further notes that before Trump, there were only three countries plus the U.S. in NATO that were meeting the 2 percent of GDP goal. By the end of this year, there will be eight countries plus the United States.

I believe that that didn’t happen because of “business as usual” at NATO.

My point is: When you change the framework of the debate and talk seriously about an American pullout from NATO if the burden isn’t shared more equitably, then instead of marginal requests to pay more, you can actually change the decisions of political leaders who have a significant stake in the outcome of the negotiations.

Draining the Swamp. A fundamental tenet of Trumpism, when he campaigned, is that the American political system is rigged. It’s rigged against average Americans. It’s rigged because, as Hillary Clinton said during the campaign, “You have to have both a private and a public position on issues, otherwise you can’t get things done or otherwise people will be able to see through you or whatever.”

As candidate Trump said in response, this was not the example of transparency that most Americans would like to see in our elected officials. It is also one of the reasons why Trump talked about “draining the swamp of the Washington establishment,” because the whole Washington-based agenda was both nontransparent and out of touch with so many Americans.

OK. So far, we have (1) think big, (2) expand the debate, and (3) drain the swamp.

Promoting Trade That Is Free and Fair. The fourth fundamental tenet of Trump populism has been that the economic order that resulted from this rigged system was unjust to the interests of many Americans.

From this perspective, look at the results of the 2016 presidential campaign. Trump carried Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania—states that traditionally vote Democrat but where voters were disenchanted over what had happened during the prior 30 years to them under both political parties. They saw and lived with skilled assembly line workers losing jobs, factories shutting down, “heartland America” becoming ghost towns, and general economic dislocation.

Enter Donald Trump. Trump argues that free trade is good as long as it is fair and reciprocal. He knows that the benefits of free trade are spread among the many, and the negative impact of free trade is very concentrated in specific areas on specific people who are severely hurt.

Moving in the Right Direction. The fifth fundamental tenet that he defined and that defined him was that the nation was moving in a direction that many citizens neither desired nor endorsed. This includes some of the cultural issues that Washington is arguing over, and it includes a top-down, interventionist, ill-defined, and ad hoc American foreign policy which is a major component of the liberal international order.

The cultural collapse and the globalism of the Obama Administration were not acceptable to Trump or to his voters.

So, with these five principles as background, how did the 2016 election happen?

It’s clear that the cultural collapse and the globalism of the Obama Administration were not acceptable to Trump or to his voters. The people demanded a reversal even though the mainstream media and the establishment overwhelmingly rejected then (and still reject) Trump and his policies.

The Record So Far: Basically Positive

Where are we now?

The leadership of President Trump and his Cabinet in deregulating at every department of the federal government has made economic opportunity more available across the board to every American.

So far, his most significant legislative achievement was the tax cut bill he signed into law last December. It positively affected every business—big,

small, and medium—and millions of ordinary citizens who received actual cash bonuses in their paychecks and whose tax withholding is lower now than before. And those business tax cuts are starting to bring increased economic growth and record high employment including among women and minorities.

Regarding trade, let me say that those of you who have known me over the years know that I was a sincere advocate for China's accession to the World Trade Organization almost 20 years ago. Yet today, we see Chinese firms violating international sanctions, dumping on world markets, stealing intellectual property, outlawing the sale of Bibles under the guise of an edict supposedly promoting religious freedom, unilaterally changing long-standing joint-venture contracts to give Communist Party apparatchiks enhanced roles in senior management where formerly there was none. And we see continuous closed markets to American firms.

And the United States is not the only country that has expressed concern about the unfair trade practices that have been prevalent in many Chinese industries and promoted by the Chinese government.

Is this evidence sufficient for the President that he has to propose tariffs? Maybe or maybe not. Believe me, he has heard vigorous arguments about it.

Earlier this month, Heritage hosted Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, who articulately defended a tit-for-tat trade policy for the Trump Administration. Then, just a few evenings ago, I hosted a small dinner in honor of the new National Economic Council Chairman, Larry Kudlow, probably the most outspoken pro-trade advocate in all of Washington. Larry is the man the President turned to when he said let's take another look at possibly joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Those are competing viewpoints, and they are all being heard in the White House.

And let me make another point about this President: Ignore what the media says. He is a President who listens, thinks, and then makes up his own mind. He pays attention to opposing views, and then he decides, and he expects the whole team to get on board and to follow his decision. This, to my way of thinking, is the way the executive branch is supposed to work.

So from my perspective, the Trump Administration is basically a positive story.

An Unconventional President

Several of you have already told me that Donald Trump is "an unconventional President." Yes, I agree with you, but we live in unconventional times. America and much of the free world have been involved in wars with an "unconventional" enemy in the form of international terrorists, who claim no sovereign territory or capital city but whose activities cost our taxpayers—and many of yours as well—hundreds of billions of dollars to deal with.

Now, in Europe, we are facing another unconventional enemy in this realm of unconventional warfare. This hybrid war has reached a new level. "Little green men," as they have been called, invaded, occupied, and still control the Crimea, a sovereign territory of an independent nation, Ukraine. This army wears no uniform, is heavily armed and controlled—or at least directed—by a foreign government—In Ukraine's case, by Putin's Russia. These forces have since invaded more of eastern Ukraine and are actively participating with Russian troops in Syria, where the United States has killed several hundred of them.

Yes, it's a new era, and a new era requires new thinking. And I believe that this involves rethinking the liberal international order.

I believe that Trumpism is wholly compatible with democracy in the American tradition.

The LIO, in Donald Trump's view, cannot mean a blind adherence to the old way of doing things including interference in all of the world's crises and in international nation-building. He has said that a strong America understands that "caution and restraint are really true signs of strength." And, again, this President has repeatedly promised that "America first is not America alone" and that America, our allies, and world peace are best served by a "disciplined, deliberate and consistent foreign policy."

I believe that Trumpism is wholly compatible with democracy in the American tradition. In fact, as an active participant in the Washington public policy process for more than 50 years, I believe that only someone from outside the political system could be making the necessary fundamental changes to update our way of doing business that this President is advocating.

Donald Trump may be outrageously unconventional with the way in which he communicates different ideas and his current thinking (Twitter), but that is the way this President operates as he gets beyond our mainstream media with its “fake news” by communicating directly with the American people.

Donald Trump—the disrupter, the big thinker, the unconventional, the Tweeting President—knows that he is in a tough fight with those who oppose him and who are determined to undermine his agenda. He fights every day for his populist agenda, which is his version of the liberal international order.

I hope these remarks will give you a different perspective on President Trump’s way of operating and thinking, and I hope that I have sparked a debate at this Asan Plenum.

—Edwin J. Feulner, PhD, is Founder and former President of and Chung Ju-yung Fellow at The Heritage Foundation. He delivered these remarks as keynote speaker at the Asan Plenum 2018, held by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul, Korea, in April 2018.