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*BUILDING A NEW AMERICAN GLOBAL LIBERAL ORDER?--REFLECTIONS ON
"RESTORING THE ROLE OF THE NATION-STATE IN THE LIBERAL
INTERNATIONAL ORDER," SECRETARY POMPEO'S SPEECH TO THE GERMAN
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ABSTRACT: In the recent speech delivered by Secretary of State Pompeo at the German Marshall Fund, Brussels, Belgium ([Restoring the Role of the Nation-State in the Liberal International Order](#): Remarks delivered by Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo at the German Marshall Fund, Brussels, Belgium, December 4, 2018), the Secretary of State sought to describe a new vision of U.S. engagement in the global order. This new order is built around national sovereignty and has as its objective the construction of a multilateral system that serves as a complement to the management of national interests within a framework of global relations. It quite consciously challenges the vision for global governance multilateralism that had emerged from the last third of the 20th century in the West. The question that Secretary Pompeo poses is an important one--is the era of global multilateralism characterized by the building of complex supra-national public and private institutions into which effective autonomous transnational regulatory authority is vested over, should it be re-considered, or must it be defended against the great states who bought built the system and now stand as its greatest opponents? This essay considers Secretary Pompeo's speech through that lens



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([Secretary Pompeo; Video Recording of Remarks](#))

I. The Rise of a New Vision of American Multilateralism; Is there Something Here worth Considering? Context

It is a pity no one takes the current administration seriously. That lament is not personal--that is, it ought not to be interpreted as any sort of judgment about the actions or character of the people who now hold positions of authority. I leave those judgements to the psychologists, politicians, ideologues, and sophists among us. Rather, it is a pity that the current administration's efforts to outline its vision for the emerging American global order has been mindlessly dismissed out of hand. That pitiable state acquires more important dimension when advanced by those who hold positions of influence (but no longer have personal or group access to power), who view this emerging Trump Administration vision, and the people who are advancing these ideas, as personal, professional, and ideological enemies. As a consequence, the current campaign by those out of power (or with no access to influence within the state apparatus) to mount (effective) campaigns of marginalization, demonization, and personal attack, obscures emerging realities, even as it advances political and ideological objectives. Agit-prop is no substitute for analysis, though it is a powerful weapon for advancing political agendas. And yet our intellectual classes have developed a taste for conflating the two.

This was very much in evidence among those with access to the global press, especially the establishment press that is used as a vehicle for the projection of influence among literate masses, in the wake of the recent speech delivered by Secretary of State Pompeo at the German Marshall Fund, Brussels, Belgium ([*Restoring the Role of the Nation-State in the Liberal*](#)

[International Order:](#) Remarks delivered by Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo at the German Marshall Fund, Brussels, Belgium, December 4, 2018).

"Responses ranged from tepid to hostile" ([Pompeo Questions the Value of International Groups Like U.N. and E.U.](#), New York Times). The speech was dismissed as ridiculous (Stewart Patrick, [Tilting at Straw Men: Secretary Pompeo's Ridiculous Brussels Speech](#), for the Council on Foreign Relations). But see [Trump building a 'new liberal world order', says secretary of state Mike Pompeo](#). The Washington Post, already quite cross with this administration for other reasons, put forward a "perspective" chiding the United States for lecturing Europeans on their own affairs and then noting: "The third and most disturbing takeaway was the number of times panelists talked about the need to cope with the United States and China, as if there were no difference between the two countries in Europe's eyes" ([Europeans are quite aware of what they're going through. Is Mike Pompeo?](#), Washington Post).

Though this last sentence was meant to heighten the criticism with which the perspective is larded, it does make the only point worth emphasizing--not as a negative but as a positive. As I have been suggesting for some time (and with greater certainty after the American elections of 2016), like it or not (and those once in positions of authority, along with influential sectors of the global intellectual classes based in the West, loathe it) two intimately related visions of the emerging global order have been emerging. Both have been dismissed out of hand. The first is that developed as the natural progression from the principles and objectives of the great project of Chinese reform that was once understood as socialist modernization and is now embodied in projects like the Belt and Road Initiative and New Era ideology. The other (which irritates people in the West more), the "America First" Initiative (an irritating name, to be sure) has become the visible expression of a cluster of ideas that are only now acquiring something that resembles a form of a different vision of the Western liberal world order. That emerging vision is organically related to the one on which powerful elements of the Western intelligentsia had banked most of its resources over the last generation, and yet it undermines its central post 1989 organizing principle--that the state must wither away under the guidance of an autonomous network of global institutional orders.

The "New Era" American vision parallels in many respects, those emerging in China as unveiled in its 19th Communist Party Congress in 2017. It represents an acknowledgement, at least in some quarters in the West, that the context in which internationalism had emerged has now changed fundamentally. That change is in large part a measure of its success, but one which appears to have consumed it. These are the ideas worth examining not in the context of personal smear campaigns that appear to mark this era of American politics, but as ideas worthy of serious intellectual engagement. The question that Secretary Pompeo poses is an important one--is the era of global multilateralism characterized by the building of complex supra-national public and private institutions into which effective autonomous transnational regulatory authority is vested over, should it be re-considered, or must it be defended against the great states who bought built the system and now stand as its greatest opponents?

This essay considers Secretary Pompeo's speech through that lens.

II. The Analysis of the Secretary's Speech: "Restoring the Role of the Nation-State in the Liberal International Order" in the Shadow of the Withering Away of the State

Secretary Pompeo started first by noting the death of former President George H.W. Bush and then using that as a springboard to the issues "that confront the Marshall Fund and confront our region as well." (Pompeo 2018). He suggested that the concerns of his administration were those of former President Bush.

"I actually think that he would be delighted for me to be here today at an institution named after a fellow lover of freedom, George Marshall. And he would have been thrilled to see all of you here, such a large crowd gathered who are dedicated to transatlantic bonds, so many decades after they were first forged." (Pompeo 2018).

This effort to insinuate alignment was criticized by those who were not inclined to view what was to come with any measure of respect. This was done in the name of the former President, though there is irony there, since it appeared only in death that Mr. Bush at last acquired even this sort of backhanded affirmation from many who at the time of his Presidency, were quite critical of his own vision. But political realignments have always had a curious effect on the perception (and retelling) of history. And it is enough, for the moment to recall that irony.

With the preliminaries out of the way Secretary Pompeo then got to business. He started by reducing the objectives of the Allies after World War II in remaking the world to a *simple essence*—"only strong U.S. leadership, in concert with our friends and allies, could unite the sovereign nations all around the globe." (Pompeo 2018). That is, that multilateralism after the Second World War was born of the conviction that the European Powers, much less the rest of the world, was incapable of self-destruction without the civilizing hand of a string power. He suggested, effectively, that it was necessary to avoid the perils of the anarchy that marked the global order before 1945, and that this objective was attainable only by putting the U.S. at the center of a re-constituted global order.

Multilateralism, then, was not an ends in itself, but the means by which a world order could emerge under the guidance and leadership of the United States. "So we underwrote new institutions to rebuild Europe and Japan, to stabilize currencies, and to facilitate trade. We all co-founded NATO to guarantee security for ourselves and our allies. We entered into treaties to codify Western values of freedom and human rights." (Pompeo 2018). The emphasis here, of course, is on the preservation of the core values of Western civilization—its ideologies and mores, the leadership responsibilities to preserve them, fell by right of war and victory to the United States. The United States, in effect, became the vanguard of the West, at least in a Leninist sense among the community of states, and assumed the obligation to lead through the creation of a united front of aligned states "to preserve Western ideals because, as President Trump made clear in his Warsaw address, each of those are worth preserving" (Pompeo 2018).

And what were the fruits of this Pax Americana? For Pompeo, "This American leadership allowed us to enjoy the greatest human flourishing in modern history. We won the Cold War. We won the peace. With no small measure of George H. W. Bush's effort, we reunited Germany." (Pompeo 2018).

But it is at this point in the speech that Secretary Pompeo suggests a historical gap. For the Secretary's listing of accomplishments of the old order appears to have ended with the triumph of the West in Europe almost half a century after the defeat of fascism, with the defeat of European Marxist-Leninism, the last of the partners of the infamous Pact between the Nazi's and the Soviets for the partitioning of Eastern Europe in 1939. It is not clear what happened to the old Pax America between 1991 and 2016. But whatever it was, the implication is that it had lost its way. Perhaps, of course, it had found a new way now that its principal mission had been accomplished. For Secretary Pompeo, that new way was corrupt. It would be tempting to suggest that Secretary Pompeo asserted that it reeks of corrosion of the old ideals in favor of a new path largely at odds with the core values on which the old system was crafted. But he did not. Rather, the corruption was one in which the means became the ends.

"After the Cold War ended, we allowed this liberal order to begin to corrode. It failed us in some places, and sometimes it failed you and the rest of the world. Multilateralism has too often become viewed as an end unto itself. The more treaties we sign, the safer we supposedly are. The more bureaucrats we have, the better the job gets done." (Pompeo 2018).

The result, however, was to substitute bureaucracies for values, and the forms of collective action for its spirit. In a sense, then, Secretary Pompeo rails against the administrative state, now gone global. These are arguments that have become more pointed over the last half century as the realities of the marriage of a popular taste for governmental regulation of broader and broader areas of human life with the administrative machinery of regulatory administration. The result has not been entirely satisfying, however necessary the result might seem. Administrative regulation has to some extent caused a substantial democratic *anomie* (a state of normlessness) in the West, as direct mass participation in government has become increasingly attenuated. This is not just democratic deficit notions, but also a fundamental problem of representation, where representatives no longer have substantially direct control over the machinery of state. Is oversight enough? We have come to believe so. But popular discontent has become more common. And it has acquired an ideology in both Marxist Leninist and Western systems.

Still, it is a little late in the day to be complaining about the rise of the bureaucratic apparatus. That apparatus has proven quite useful even to those who complain loudest about its autonomy (caricatured as the deep state, in part), and its inefficiencies (e.g., the Stalinist [nomenklatura](#) and its progeny). And bureaucracies do tend to do the dirty work that elected representatives find politically toxic. Indeed, on that score it might be argued that elected officials (and those who make their tenure possible) have little to complain about and much to explain as they free ride galore on the administrative state which serves them as both a sword and shield. That sword and shield could be used both to protect their interests and to build accountability walls between them and the electorate. That may lead some to conclude that elected officials tend to be the agents of state that appear to profit most from the administrative state over which they preside and appear to be unable to control. The [democratic deficit](#), the bureaucratic autonomy of the state apparatus, and its unresponsive cultures, are as much evidence of the failures of elected officials to undertake their duties faithfully (to someone other than themselves) as they point to failures of the operational systems over which democratic institutions preside. That is, the failures of the

bureaucratic apparatus is that of the elected official, and neither that of the masses or of the bureaucrats themselves. The later is especially true where, taking their cue from the cultures of elected officials, bureaucrats view their role as first preserving their institutions and then preserving their own authority within it.

Yet, the whining (and yes, that *is* a judgment about the quality of engagement) about the administrative state and its rudderless state of operation, does provide Secretary Pompeo with an excellent rhetorical platform from which *he asks a question worth asking*—and worth asking especially of the leaders who ostensibly preside over their bureaucracies: “The central question that we face is that – is the question of whether the system as currently configured, as it exists today, and as the world exists today – does it work? Does it work for all the people of the world?” (Pompeo 2018). This is a question worth asking—and one that has been asked repeatedly in quarters that tend to be marginalized by the bureaucrats and their supporters among the intelligentsia and their allies in media organs of the press and television. As the global order, perhaps even as a marker of its own success, moves into a “new era” of economic, social, and cultural relations, to what extent are the structures and cultures that brought us to this point still serving their purpose? Any purpose, really, other than their own self perpetuation? The question can be more pointedly asked as a variation of the old question about the medium becoming the message—to what extent have the forms of globalization and the methods of the global order have now displaced the normative objectives for which they were deployed.

Now, these are questions worth asking. Secretary Pompeo was right to raise them, though of course one can quibble about the way in which he brings this up. And yet, by bringing it up at a very public meeting, he did two things that might be lauded. The first was to target the question, and the message, to the masses beyond the “insiders” to which these sorts of things are sometimes addressed. The second was that using the form of an address to raise these issues also brought up the issue of transparency. Indeed, it might well have been taken as an implication that it is now time for someone other than insiders to consider the question. I have not the slightest sense that this will happen. But it is nice from time to time to recall that the bureaucratic class and their overlords—elected officials—are not masterless *ronin* (浪人) running around as they please to be hired by who ever needs a handy sword. Western ideology demands accountability to the masses; and it is to the masses ultimately that the question of the organization of their state (and global) apparatus ought to be directed. The failure to do so detaches our ideology from practice in ways that may call into question the legitimacy of the resulting government. And that—a point ceaselessly made by Western intellectuals against the Chinese Marxist-Leninist government—now nicely comes home to roost in the most unexpected form of speeches like this.

But back to business. Having asked the question, Secretary Pompeo then seeks to provide an answer. He looks at contemporary multilateralism and sees in it institutionalized Jew-baiting, self-perpetuating peace missions that produce its opposite, and a state of *realpolitik* that makes a mockery of the founding ideology of the Pax Americana—at least with respect to democracy and markets. He points to examples from Europe, Asia to Latin America. He notes the draft in international financial institutions. And all from an American traditionalist ideological perspective—yet the one on which the institutions were for the most part founded. And then he plunged the knife into his host’s chest: “But Brexit – if nothing else – was a political wake-up call.

Is the EU ensuring that the interests of countries and their citizens are placed before those of bureaucrats here in Brussels?” (Pompeo 2018).

Yes, of course, there is much to quibble about here. And those who support the way the international system has moved to reconstitute itself in this new era in ways unchallenged (except from the periphery) before 2016, can (and should) easily dismiss this. Yet there is the point—either way ideology has shifted or institutional structures have drifted from founding ideology. Either trajectory ought to have called for substantially more conscious and democratic deliberation than what appears to have occurred. Perhaps that would have been a better point to have made.

These questions, which Secretary Pompeo throws out, produce two conclusions: “Bad actors have exploited our lack of leadership for their own gain. This is the poisoned fruit of American retreat. President Trump is determined to reverse that.” (Pompeo 2018). This is worth unpacking.

The first is easy enough to unpack, and Secretary Pompeo devotes a substantial part of his remarks to pointing fingers. The principal targets are China, Iran, and Russia, with Venezuela and Cuba lurking (as is appropriate for lower tier states in a de facto hierarchically arranged order of states). These criticisms are drawn from, and attention is drawn to, the much overlooked U.S. National Security Strategy and its elaboration of what it “deemed “principled realism.” I like to think of it as “common sense.” (Pompeo 2018). The [National Security Strategy of the United States](#) (4 Dec. 2017) is itself something worth reading in its own right (my discussion here: [Ruminations 76: From Global to Fortress America](#)). Secretary Pompeo suggests the extent to which it is not just a strategic but an ideological document. For that reason alone it ought to acquire greater importance.

The second is the more interesting. The suggestion is that the multilateralism of the post Soviet era produced error. *It produced error by substituting the process of multilateralism for the substance of American leadership.* It is in this sense that one can begin to understand the ideological element of the criticism of the structures, especially of post September 11, 2001 era globalism from the perspective of this administration. Having embraced multilateralism as the means through which the old order was vindicated after 1989, the Americans then choose to lose themselves in the very order they created. Rather than lead, they offered themselves up as the first sacrifice to a global order in which they would blend in with the rest. *In a sense, the fear of the Administration is precisely the goal, quickly abandoned by Stalin after 1924 (e.g., [here](#))—that the Pax Americana, through its multilateral institutions, might well achieve what the Soviets could not after 1919: the withering away of the state (e.g., Lenin, "[The State and Revolution](#)").* And ironically, in this context, it is the American’s strategic competitors—Russia and China—that offered nationalist models for avoiding the plunge toward multilateralist oblivion. For the U.S., like the Chinese, the idea now of a global order under the leadership of an administrative apparatus to which the global community has ceded authority, is a step too far. That is what they see; that is what they fear; and the American intellectual elite would have been complicit in this project.

Through this lens, then, it is much easier to understand the ideology underlying the way the question was asked: “Every nation – every nation – must honestly acknowledge its responsibilities to its citizens and ask if the current international order serves the good of its people

as well as it could. And if not, we must ask how we can right it.” (Pompeo 2018). The answer naturally followed:

“This is what President Trump is doing. He is returning the United States to its traditional, central leadership role in the world. He sees the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. He knows that nothing can replace the nation-state as the guarantor of democratic freedoms and national interests. He knows, as George H.W. Bush knew, that a safer world has consistently demanded American courage on the world stage. And when we – and when we all of us ignore our responsibilities to the institutions we’ve formed, others will abuse them.”

In place of the withering of the state within the bureaucracies of global administrative orders, the *Trump Administration offers American leadership for mutually beneficial cooperation, a strategic nationalist multilateral engagement, among states engaged in the task of protecting their national interests and fulfilling their national aspirations*. But this mutually beneficial cooperation through multilateralism is, in form, almost identical to China’s mutually beneficial cooperation principle of foreign relations, one recently itself embedded into the international system by the U.N. Human Rights Council (for discussion, see [On the Internationalization of China's "New Era" Theory](#)). The difference is in ideological impact. American leadership furthers American values—democracy and markets; Chinese leadership does the same for theirs; as do the Iranians. The ideologies are not entirely compatible and thus competition and alignment for mutual benefit where that is possible. Again the ideology of the US National Security Strategy jumps out.

Secretary Pompeo notes that the new American initiative is not a rejection of multilateralism, but rather its re-focus along nationalist lines. He rejects the claim that “America is acting unilaterally instead of multilaterally, as if every kind of multilateral action is by definition desirable. Even our European friends sometimes say we’re not acting in the world’s interest. This is just plain wrong” (Pompeo 2018). And, implicitly criticizing the current understanding of the global multilateralism project, he asserts.

“Our mission is to reassert our sovereignty, reform the liberal international order, and we want our friends to help us and to exert their sovereignty as well. We aspire to make the international order serve our citizens – not to control them. America intends to lead – now and always. Under President Trump, we are not abandoning international leadership or our friends in the international system.”(Pompeo 2018).

Secretary Pompeo then explains how this new approach works, at least he provides a summary of the ground rules of “America First Multilateralism.” He explains: “International bodies must help facilitate cooperation that bolsters the security and values of the free world, or they must be reformed or eliminated. When treaties are broken, the violators must be confronted, and the treaties must be fixed or discarded. Words should mean something.” (Pompeo 2018).

The principal purpose of multilateralism is the ancient ones—advance American values (again with reference to the values triumphant after the end of the Second World War), and enhance security. That is it. Of course, many will quibble about what this means. For traditionalists, of course, the Obama Administration’s position represents the contemporary

expression of America values (and for them the speech is thus nonsense). As well, for them, multilateralism itself represents the sort of security to which the Pax Americana strove. But those are precisely the principles rejected by the Trump Administration in favor of what it views as an earlier iteration of the multilateral enterprise, one grounded in national interest bent to the furtherance of common values. Though trade is missing here, one, again, would have to have the benefit of the [*National Security Strategy of the United States*](#) (4 Dec. 2017) to understand the connection between trade and security within the world view of the Trump administration.

This is not an entirely unilateral exercise. The Trump Administration “is thus lawfully exiting or renegotiating outdated or harmful treaties, trade agreements, and other international arrangements that do not serve our sovereign interests, or the interests of our allies.” (Pompeo 2018). That approach is then used to explain the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on Climate, the Iran nuclear deal, and the renegotiation of NAFTA into the USMCA. It is used to support U.S. to reform WTO, and to “refocus” the lending and technical support machinery of the IMF and World Bank. And echoing an earlier speech by John Bolton (e.g., [*Thoughts on John Bolton: Address to the Federalist Society, Washington, D.C. on US policy toward the International Criminal Court*](#)), Secretary Pompeo relied on this view of multilateralism in the U.S. opposition to the project of an international criminal law and the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

And the point of these quite strategic interventions? Well, it represents the dismantling of a house built on weak foundations to rebuild multilateralism on principles of mutually beneficial cooperation under the leadership of the United States. To that end, Secretary Pompeo asserts: “President Trump is not undermining these institutions, nor is he abandoning American leadership. Quite the opposite. In the finest traditions of our great democracy, we are rallying the noble nations of the world to build a new liberal order that prevents war and achieves greater prosperity for all.”

What does this mean in practice? Well, for starters it means support for public-private efforts to make economic transactions more efficient. “For example, here in Belgium in 1973, banks from 15 countries formed SWIFT to develop common standards for cross-border payments, and it’s now an integral part of our global financial infrastructure” (Pompeo 2018). But, of course, this economic cooperation has strategic value as well—it served as the front line for detaching Iran from the international financial system as part of U.S. sanctions. In addition, Secretary Pompeo offers both NATO and the “Proliferation Security Initiative, formed by 11 nations under the Bush administration to stop trafficking in weapons of mass destruction” (Pompeo 2018).

And that is how Secretary Pompeo ends things. He reaffirms that his project, and that of the U.S. Administration, is to dismantle the structures of institutionalized multilateralism, and to reduce the autonomy and authority of international organizations founded on multilateral efforts. He reaffirms that the state must be centered in multilateralism, and that American values, and its leadership, should also be centered in the construction of a values based strategic system of mutual cooperation serving the national interests of the United States and its allies, even as it reinforces shared values.

Yet this ending also is steeped in irony. On the one hand he wants to preserve and assert American values and leadership; on the other hand to succeed in that assertion, he will have to dismantle the products of American leadership and its (changed) values. But then, that is the most

important message that Secretary Pompeo did not make—that America had effectively betrayed its own values by conceding the transformation of multilateralism into its present form. Contemporary multilateralism is both foreign and exotic to the American values President Trump would further. And its fundamental faults lie in its marginalization of national interest and national identity. Yet that is precisely the arc of development that the United States fostered since the demise of the Soviet Empire. It is in this sense, that Mr. Trump might view himself as anti-imperialist, drawing the United States back to its territory and away from the ideal that its values can be universalized as the United States merged into the world and the multilateral apparatus it had created.

And this project is not viewed as narrowly nationalist, but also ideological—a return to a global battle of values that pits one nationalist multilateralism vision (America First) against a number of others, and principally China’s Belt and Road Initiative. “Sometimes it’s not popular to buck the status quo, to call out that which we all see but sometimes refuse to speak about. But frankly, too much is at stake for all of us in this room today not to do so. This is the reality that President Trump so viscerally understands. Just as George Marshall’s generation gave life to a new vision for a safe and free world, so we call on you to have the same kind of boldness. Our call is especially urgent – especially urgent in light of the threats we face from powerful countries and actors whose ambition is to reshape the international order in its own illiberal image” (Pompeo 2018).

And thus, the vision. It is neither implausible nor impossible. This is possibly the most irritating thing about the vision to its opponents; it belies efforts to dismiss this as the incoherent babblings of an individual and his administration “unqualified” to make them. The vision may be wrong, its principles not worth embracing, but it is not incoherent. It reflects more the forward movement of emerging great powers—China and Russia in particular—rather than the values that produced the multilateral world order that the United States elected leaders abandoned in November 2016. It has found its way into the very structures of multilateralism in the Human Rights Council. *Mutually beneficial cooperation grounded in the preservation of national interests and values in concert with others is at the base of China’s New Era approach to multilateralism; it is now as well that of the United States.* I had suggested its broad outline as early as 2006 (see [Economic Globalization Ascendant](#)).

It is fair enough to reject this vision on principle; indeed, much of the debate ought to be about the underlying principles that separate America First (and China’s Belt and Road Initiative), from the vision of global institutional multilateralism that both reject. It is the failure to engage these principles that is lamentable—attacks on the character of the President is no substitute. Where this will take the United States, and the world remains to be seen. But from the perspective of the United States, this is another strategic move in a hybrid contest with its competitors and enemies.

Remarks

"Restoring the Role of the Nation-State in the Liberal International Order"

Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State

German Marshall Fund
Brussels, Belgium
December 4, 2018

<https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/12/287770.htm>

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Ian, for the kind introduction. Good morning to all of you; thank you for joining me here today. It's wonderful to be in this beautiful place, to get a chance to make a set of remarks about the very work that you do, the issues that confront the Marshall Fund and confront our region as well.

Before I start today with my formal remarks, it would be – I would be enormously remiss if I did not pay a well-deserved tribute to America's 41st president, George Herbert Walker Bush. He was a – many of you know him. He was an unyielding champion of freedom around the world — first as a fighter pilot in World War II, later as a congressman. He was the ambassador to the United Nations, and then an envoy to China. He then had the same job I had as the director of the CIA – I did it longer than he did. He was then the vice president under Ronald Reagan.

I got to know him some myself. He was a wonderful brother, a father, a grandfather, and a proud American. Indeed, America is the only country he loved more than Texas. (Laughter.)

I actually think that he would be delighted for me to be here today at an institution named after a fellow lover of freedom, George Marshall. And he would have been thrilled to see all of you here, such a large crowd gathered who are dedicated to transatlantic bonds, so many decades after they were first forged.

The men who rebuilt Western civilization after World War II, like my predecessor Secretary Marshall, knew that only strong U.S. leadership, in concert with our friends and allies, could unite the sovereign nations all around the globe.

So we underwrote new institutions to rebuild Europe and Japan, to stabilize currencies, and to facilitate trade. We all co-founded NATO to guarantee security for ourselves and our allies. We entered into treaties to codify Western values of freedom and human rights.

Collectively, we convened multilateral organizations to promote peace and cooperation among states. And we worked hard – indeed, tirelessly – to preserve Western ideals because, as President Trump made clear in his Warsaw address, each of those are worth preserving.

This American leadership allowed us to enjoy the greatest human flourishing in modern history.

We won the Cold War. We won the peace. With no small measure of George H. W. Bush's effort, we reunited Germany. This is the type of leadership that President Trump is boldly reasserting.

After the Cold War ended, we allowed this liberal order to begin to corrode. It failed us in some places, and sometimes it failed you and the rest of the world. Multilateralism has too often become viewed as an end unto itself. The more treaties we sign, the safer we supposedly are. The more bureaucrats we have, the better the job gets done.

Was that ever really true? The central question that we face is that – is the question of whether the system as currently configured, as it exists today, and as the world exists today – does it work? Does it work for all the people of the world?

Today at the United Nations, peacekeeping missions drag on for decades, no closer to peace. The UN's climate-related treaties are viewed by some nations as simply a vehicle to redistribute wealth. Anti-Israel bias has been institutionalized. Regional powers collude to vote the likes of Cuba and Venezuela onto the Human Rights Council. The UN was founded as an organization that welcomed peace-loving nations. I ask: Today, does it continue to serve its mission faithfully?

In the Western Hemisphere, has enough been done with the Organization of American States to promote its four pillars of democracy, human rights, security, and economic development in a region that includes the likes of Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua?

In Africa, does the African Union advance the mutual interest of its nation-state members?

For the business community, from which I came, consider this: The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were chartered to help rebuild war-torn territories and promote private investment and growth. Today, these institutions often counsel countries who have mismanaged their economic affairs to impose austerity measures that inhibit growth and crowd out private sector actors.

Here in Brussels, the European Union and its predecessors have delivered a great deal of prosperity to the entire continent. Europe is America's single largest trading partner, and we benefit enormously from your success. But Brexit – if nothing else – was a political wake-up call. Is the EU ensuring that the interests of countries and their citizens are placed before those of bureaucrats here in Brussels?

These are valid questions. This leads to my next point: Bad actors have exploited our lack of leadership for their own gain. This is the poisoned fruit of American retreat. President Trump is determined to reverse that.

China's economic development did not lead to an embrace of democracy and regional stability; it led to more political repression and regional provocations. We welcomed China into the liberal order, but never policed its behavior.

China has routinely exploited loopholes in the World Trade Organization rules, imposed market restrictions, forced technology transfers, and stolen intellectual property. And it knows that world opinion is powerless to stop its Orwellian human rights violations.

Iran didn't join the community of nations after the nuclear deal was inked; it spread its newfound riches to terrorists and to dictators.

Tehran holds multiple American hostages, and Bob Levinson has been missing there for 11 years. Iran has blatantly disregarded UN Security Council resolutions, lied to the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors about its nuclear program, and evaded UN sanctions. Just this past week, Iran test fired a ballistic missile, in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Earlier this year, Tehran used the U.S.-Iran Treaty of Amity to bring baseless claims against the United States before the International Court of Justice – most all of this malign activity during the JCPOA.

Russia. Russia hasn't embraced Western values of freedom and international cooperation. Rather, it has suppressed opposition voices and invaded the sovereign nations of Georgia and of Ukraine.

Moscow has also deployed a military-grade nerve agent on foreign soil, right here in Europe, in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention to which it is a party. And as I'll detail later today, Russia has violated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty for many years.

The list goes on. We have to account for the world order of today in order to chart the way forward. It is what America's National Security Strategy deemed "principled realism." I like to think of it as "common sense."

Every nation – every nation – must honestly acknowledge its responsibilities to its citizens and ask if the current international order serves the good of its people as well as it could. And if not, we must ask how we can right it.

This is what President Trump is doing. He is returning the United States to its traditional, central leadership role in the world. He sees the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. He knows that nothing can replace the nation-state as the guarantor of democratic freedoms and national interests. He knows, as George H.W. Bush knew, that a safer world has consistently demanded American courage on the world stage. And when we – and when we all of us ignore our responsibilities to the institutions we've formed, others will abuse them.

Critics in places like Iran and China – who really are undermining the international order – are saying the Trump administration is the reason this system is breaking down. They claim America is acting unilaterally instead of multilaterally, as if every kind of multilateral action is by definition desirable. Even our European friends sometimes say we're not acting in the world's interest. This is just plain wrong.

Our mission is to reassert our sovereignty, reform the liberal international order, and we want our

friends to help us and to exert their sovereignty as well. We aspire to make the international order serve our citizens – not to control them. America intends to lead – now and always.

Under President Trump, we are not abandoning international leadership or our friends in the international system. Indeed, quite the contrary. Just look, as one example, at the historic number of countries which have gotten on board our pressure campaign against North Korea. No other nation in the world could have rallied dozens of nations, from every corner of the world, to impose sanctions on the regime in Pyongyang.

International bodies must help facilitate cooperation that bolsters the security and values of the free world, or they must be reformed or eliminated.

When treaties are broken, the violators must be confronted, and the treaties must be fixed or discarded. Words should mean something.

Our administration is thus lawfully exiting or renegotiating outdated or harmful treaties, trade agreements, and other international arrangements that do not serve our sovereign interests, or the interests of our allies.

We announced our intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change, absent better terms for the United States. The current pact would've siphoned money from American paychecks and enriched polluters like China.

In America, we've found a better solution – we think a better solution for the world. We've unleashed our energy companies to innovate and compete, and our carbon emissions have declined dramatically.

We changed course from the Iran deal, because of, among other things, Tehran's violent and destabilizing activities, which undermined the spirit of the deal and put the safety of American people and our allies at risk. In its place, we are leading our allies to constrain Iran's revolutionary ambitions and end Iran's campaigns of global terrorism. And we needn't a new bureaucracy to do it. We need to continue to develop a coalition which will achieve that outcome which will keep people in the Middle East, in Europe, and the entire world safe from the threat from Iran.

America renegotiated our treaty, NAFTA, to advance the interests of the American worker. President Trump proudly signed the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement at the G20 this past weekend in Buenos Aires, and on Friday will submit it to the Congress, a body accountable to the American people.

The new agreement also includes renegotiation provisions, because no trade agreement is permanently suited to all times.

We have encouraged our G20 partners to reform the WTO, and they took a good first step in Buenos Aires this last week.

I spoke earlier about the World Bank and the IMF. The Trump Administration is working to refocus these institutions on policies that promote economic prosperity, pushing to halt lending to nations that can already access global capital markets – countries like China – and pressing to reduce taxpayer handouts to development banks that are perfectly capable of raising private capital on their own.

We're also taking leadership, real action to stop rogue international courts, like the International Criminal Court, from trampling on our sovereignty – your sovereignty – and all of our freedoms. The ICC's Office of the Prosecutor is trying to open an investigation into U.S. personnel in connection with the war in Afghanistan. We will take all necessary steps to protect our people, those of our NATO allies who fight alongside of us inside of Afghanistan from unjust prosecution. Because we know that if it can happen to our people, it can happen to yours too. It is a worthy question: Does the court continue to serve its original intended purpose?

The first two years of the Trump administration demonstrate that President Trump is not undermining these institutions, nor is he abandoning American leadership. Quite the opposite. In the finest traditions of our great democracy, we are rallying the noble nations of the world to build a new liberal order that prevents war and achieves greater prosperity for all.

We're supporting institutions that we believe can be improved; institutions that work in American interests – and yours – in service of our shared values.

For example, here in Belgium in 1973, banks from 15 countries formed SWIFT to develop common standards for cross-border payments, and it's now an integral part of our global financial infrastructure.

SWIFT recently disconnected sanctioned Iranian banks from its platform because of the unacceptable risk they pose to a system – to the system as a whole. This is an excellent example of American leadership working alongside an international institution to act responsibly.

Another example: the Proliferation Security Initiative, formed by 11 nations under the Bush administration to stop trafficking in weapons of mass destruction. It has since grown organically to 105 countries and has undoubtedly made the world safer.

And I can't forget, standing here, one of the most important international institutions of them all – which will continue to thrive with American leadership. My very first trip, within hours of having been sworn in as a secretary of state, I traveled here to visit with our NATO allies. I'll repeat this morning what I said then – this is an indispensable institution. President Trump wants everyone to pay their fair share so we can deter our enemies and defend people – the people of our countries.

To that end, all NATO allies should work to strengthen what is already the greatest military alliance in all of history.

Never – never – has an alliance ever been so powerful or so peaceful, and our historic ties must continue.

To that end, I'm pleased to announce that I will host my foreign minister colleagues for a meeting in Washington next April, where we will mark NATO's 70th anniversary.

As my remarks come to a close, I want to repeat what George Marshall told the UN General Assembly back near the time of its formation in 1948. He said, quote, "International organizations cannot take the place of national and personal effort or of local and individual imagination; international action cannot replace self-help." End of quote.

Sometimes it's not popular to buck the status quo, to call out that which we all see but sometimes refuse to speak about. But frankly, too much is at stake for all of us in this room today not to do so. This is the reality that President Trump so viscerally understands.

Just as George Marshall's generation gave life to a new vision for a safe and free world, so we call on you to have the same kind of boldness. Our call is especially urgent – especially urgent in light of the threats we face from powerful countries and actors whose ambition is to reshape the international order in its own illiberal image.

Let's work together. Let's work together to preserve the free world so that it continues to serve the interests of the people to whom we each are accountable.

Let's do so in a way that creates international organizations that are agile, that respect national sovereignty, that deliver on their stated missions, and that create value for the liberal order and for the world.

President Trump understands deeply that when America leads, peace and prosperity almost certainly follow.

He knows that if America and our allies here in Europe don't lead, others will choose to do so.

America will, as it has always done, continue to work with our allies around the world towards the peaceful, liberal order each citizen of the world deserves.

Thank you for joining me here today. May the Good Lord bless each and every one of you. Thank you. (Applause.)