

U.S. Department of State

Diplomacy in Action

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

Remarks

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

German Marshall Fund

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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.)

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