

ACT Blamey Oration

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It only takes a room full of Americans for the English and the Australians to realize how much they have in common. Stephen Fry

If the Americans and the English are two peoples uniquely separated by a common language, history will record that Americans and Australians were uniquely united by a common purpose.

I'm not even sure how to begin tonight. Mercifully for you, I won't speak long and much of what I'll say will be happily forgettable, but many of the words I'll utter this evening will be words of my profound respect for this country, and tribute and sincere thanks.

For me, personally, Ladies and Gentlemen, the relationship to Australia is the blood deep connection of the shared experience of combat, for there are names of precious young Australians inscribed on that hallowed roll of honor, that long roll of the dead at the Australian War Memorial, who served under my command in Afghanistan. You have no idea the pain I felt with each loss, and it would be my sad, but solemn duty and honor, to walk with your commanders and Paul Foley your ambassador, in heat and the dust of Uruzgan, that now distant place, as we escorted the remains of your honored dead onto your waiting aircraft for the last journey home to their grieving families.

But my impressions of Australians and this great country were not, and are not shaped by that experience alone. It has been the singular privilege of my life to have served with Australian Defense Force elements in ... now ... three conflicts. In Iraq against Al Qaeda, in Afghanistan against the Taliban, and in the conflict against yet another evil force, the so-called Islamic State or Da'esh.

I remember that night, in the early months of the conflict when I flew into a place called Al Assad in the western desert of the Al Anbar Province of Iraq. While Iraqis fought elements of IS just a few kilometers away on the Euphrates River, Coalition partners were training ISF elements and tribal volunteers to hold the ground against the onslaught of this abomination.

That night I would be briefed, as President Obama's special envoy to the Coalition, on the efforts underway to train and prepare Iraqis to take back their country. I remember two young Coalition officers entered the room ... both showing the classic wear and tear of long hours in the desert, bone deep tans and what I call "wise eyes" – eyes that have seen and experienced things most cannot imagine or explain.

I immediately noticed the reaction of Iraqi military officers and sheikhs in the room as these two young men entered, for in their Iraqi faces you could see the respect they had for these warriors. The first bearded officer spoke, and it was clear to me he was an American Green Beret, but when the other young officer spoke, it was clear I was in the

presence of a young Australian SAS officer, and it was also clear to me the Iraqis and the sheikhs regarded him with awe.

Here was yet again another manifestation of what I consider to be the vital and the outsized role Australia plays in the world today. While Australia's role could be explained or reduced to dollar considerations, luckily for the world, in ways far beyond the means and desires of most of the nations of the world, Australia stands for freedom, and daily contributes to those in this world who are sorely oppressed ... and in this moment of uncertainty in the world, I thank God for the presence and perseverance of our friend, of Australia, on the front lines of the defense of democracy and free peoples in this world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I threatened my host here in Australia, MG Mick Crane with a discussion this evening of one of the three of my Presidential Leadership Priorities at the Brookings Institution. Of the three, the future of the global middle class, American leadership in the 21st Century, and AI and emerging technologies. I'd like to briefly discuss the second: *American leadership in the 21st Century*. I can't do the entire topic justice in these few minutes, but I want to make a few important points.

Let me say this is a very difficult moment in American history, and certainly, in that context, world history. For us in Washington each week brings us another layer of events which in another moment in American history would have been either unthinkable or intolerable.

Last week illustrates my point: Sadly, the week culminated with the death of our 41st President George H. W. Bush. He was a man of unimpeachable integrity, indomitable will, unquestionable courage, who would lead America, all of America, and the West out of the Cold War era and into an era with the nearly immediate uncertainties of the post-Soviet era, including the first Gulf war. As president he and his administration have left a legacy that burns brightly as an example of what US and American leadership can mean when guided by principle, values, and a commitment to the rule of law.

Other events of the week included:

Russians firing on and capturing Ukrainian vessels and sailors near the Kerch Strait in the Black Sea. More broadly this is continued Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The G20 ... and President Trump's and Xi's dinner where it appears there's been a 90 day pause in the so-called trade war between these two countries.

The US Senate 63-37 rejected further US support to the Saudi led war in Yemen, in many ways a rejection of President Trump's unwillingness to condemn the Khashoggi murder, which the US CIA said with high confidence was almost certainly called for by the Crown Prince.

The public admonishment by the Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court of the President's condemnation of Federal judges appointed under the Obama administration – utterly unprecedented.

President Trump's public criticism of the Chairman of the Federal Reserve over interest rates.

Fresh revelations associated with the Mueller investigation, to include Trump in Moscow, and paying hush money.

The realities settling in of the US midterm election, which was indeed a blue wave. Sadly, the President chose to make it about him and that didn't go well. The outcome is not only a signal about the 2020 election, it's a signal of the future of American politics, in particular the role of women and minorities.

This is just one week, Ladies and Gentlemen. There's some or all of this kind of news virtually every week, and America is lunging from one crisis to the next. Nearly all of them self-inflicted. So far American institutions are holding. So far, the vision of our Founders, as reflected in our Constitution, of the positive dynamic tension of the three branches of the US government, is holding, but under this Administration, the distortions of the relationships between the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary are taking a toll on the American body politic.

I don't have to tell this audience that democracy as a form of governance is very difficult and real democracies as a form of government are very fragile. They cannot pivot quickly, as can illiberal or authoritarian states, *but they can react*, and the result of the midterm election in the US, where the House of Representatives and a large number of State Governorships went to the Democratic Party is likely a harbinger of things to come.

This brings me to American Leadership in the 21st Century, and increasingly, with our friends overseas – internationally – I make the point that there is a difference between current US leadership and traditional American leadership.

And at this point, I must make the disclaimer that The Brookings Institution is non-partisan in its work, or, put differently, politically neutral. But we are not values neutral, and as a public policy research institution, which is, theoretically, what a think tank is, we will concentrate not on the politics, but rather the issues, and employ evidence based, fact driven research, including big data analytics, to develop non-partisan advice and policy options for decision makers at multiple levels. So, with that said, let me address what's changed so dramatically in the last two years, and the challenges ahead in the 21st Century.

President Trump's world view is vastly different from his predecessors. Under all World War II, Cold War, and post-Cold War US presidents, the international rules based system, manifested in a network of multilateral arrangements – economic, political, and security – created and preserved, globally, broad stability. The rule of law and

fundamental adherence to the tenets of universal human rights were what defined our US-led international collective approach to international relations, where we were, together, all of us, greater than simply the arithmetic sum of our parts. From that broad basis and reality, the US conducted its international relations supporting our allies, our friends, and partners, and we made it clear to enemies and those who would disturb these arrangements that there would be a cost to their threatening behavior.

To be sure, our policies weren't pure, and sometimes our failures were spectacular, but these arrangements generally kept the peace and fostered an international system of economic intercourse the likes of which we've never seen before in the long march of human history. Indeed, much of what China has become grew up in the protective shadow of this reality. To this point in our modern history, this was what characterized American leadership in the world.

Against this backdrop, the world view of Donald Trump is very different, and under his version of US leadership, we've seen a number of profound changes to the manner in which the US interacts in this world. I'll detail five, but there are others. I'll add, all of these points are either stated positions or derived from his speeches or his Tweets. These are not my opinions, though, I'll color them a bit with implications as I lay them out.

First, he favors bilateralism versus multilateralism, which has explained his approaches to the G-7 and G-20. It's also explained his views on NATO, the EU, and the UN.

Second, he views US led international economic and security relationships as transactional versus transformational, which has been the traditional role of America. He's working for the best deal he can get for America. This has defined his view about TPP, NAFTA, the Paris Climate Accord, and the Joint Plan of Action, or, JCPOA, with Iran. It's also shaped his views on burden sharing. Which brings us to:

Third, he's placed America first, and to the extent anyone can understand specifically what that means, it's at least manifested in his views on fair trade versus free trade. This topic alone could fill an evening's oration, but the reality is that America First is translating into America Alone. "I was elected President of the US, not president of the world."

Fourth, he's been clear from the moment of his inaugural speech that the US will not impose itself or its values on other states. This is actually chilling, and not only an abandonment of a traditional American role in championing human rights, but we've seen his open encouragement of illiberal or authoritarian strongmen, and, by the way, they're always men, including Putin, Duterte, Erdoğan, Orbán, Kim Jong-un, Mohammad bin Salman, and Xi Jinping. This has sent mixed messages to our precious allies, Australia among them, and emboldened petty dictators, authoritarians, and potential tyrants who feel they can act with impunity. The murder of Jamal Khashoggi is almost certainly a conspicuous and the most recent example.

And finally, fifth, as one of our foreign Brookings Fellows observed, “he’s done great violence to the civility that has characterized the American political discourse”, which has traditionally set a standard internationally for the language of conflict resolution and crisis management. The bombast, and intemperate language, often delivered over Twitter, has alienated many of our friends, and created unnecessary crises.

Last year for example, the language surrounding the lead up to US-NK meeting left me uncertain for the first time in my life as to whether US would be waging nuclear war in Northeast Asia. The theory that Twitter rants forced Kim Jong-un to the table in Singapore is specious. He got that which no Kim, his grandfather, Kim Il-sung; or his father, Kim Jong-il, had ever achieved, the appearance of the acceptance of North Korea as a nuclear state by the US and its President, and to this point, the US has gotten nothing for the effort.

These are five hard truths and realities that in many ways define US leadership in the world today, versus the traditional values based American leadership with which we were accustomed. And while I will not comment on the politics versus the policies of this moment, those present within the sound of my voice should be assured that while the difference between US and American leadership is an important distinction today, I believe we will return to an era of constructive American re-engagement and leadership. To me the question isn’t whether America will seek re-engagement, my concern is how much will the world have changed, perhaps irretrievably changed politically, economically, structurally, in reaction to this era of Trumpian nationalism and a stated overarching policy of America First?

So, against that sobering backdrop, what are the challenges America faces in the 21st Century.

Let me start by acknowledging the environment into which President Trump was thrust as America’s 45th President. He, in fact, inherited a pretty tough hand from a string of American presidents.

To that extent, President Trump came into office having to deal with:

A Middle East in turmoil, the on-going ISIS conflict; unresolved Middle East peace, and the unfinished business of the war in Afghanistan; a China that is manifestly unfair in many of its trading practices and especially, in the aftermath of the 19th Party Congress, a China starting to double down on its strategic power and assertiveness; a hostile Russia in many forms and on many fronts; a North Korea likely now armed with an ICBM that can strike the continental US, and multiple nuclear warheads; and, internally in the US, he’s had to deal with many unresolved economic and social issues which have deeply affected the American lower-middle class, to include a large segment of the American white population he was able to fashion into a solid voting base in his support.

So, as I talk about American leadership in the 21st Century, it's framed more in the context of questions we must face:

First, how will the US be positioned in the 21st Century vis a vis other major powers: China, India, Russia, Europe, and the rise of digital governance?

Second, how will the US manage events in the Middle East, which continue unabated to create regional turmoil, conflict and economic migration, and destabilized politics in Europe?

There are other issues associated with global megatrends we must face, including the growing urgency of climate change, but time tonight doesn't allow me to address these issues.

In terms of great power relations, obviously shaping the 21st Century relationship with China is the most urgent. At Brookings, we believe the US-China relationship will be the *consequential* relationship of the 21st Century, and we talk about the four Cs in defining that relationship: Cooperation, Competition, Confrontation, and Conflict, as well as a 5th C for Communications that ties them all together.

The problem today with the China relationship is that it is shaped less by a comprehensive policy formulation than it is profoundly dominated by economic issues with trade at the heart of the relationship being shaped by the so-called "easy" trade war.

The G20 dinner between Trump and Xi, which was potentially positive, resulted in a 90 day pause of the planned escalation of US tariff jump from 10 to 25 percent on \$200b in Chinese goods. I'm not confident this will pan out, though the Chinese seem committed to creating progress. And of course, now in Washington, Trump's advisors are scrambling to try to explain Trump's usual vast overstatement of his bilateral steak with Xi.

This is on top of the other tensions with China: Taiwan, the Social Credit System, DPRK, the Belt and Road Initiative, development competition in the developing world, etc. The list is long, and sadly lengthening, and as we deal with China, we need to consider several factors:

We cannot contain China. Even as a bad policy a generation ago, this would be impossible today even if we wanted to. The problem is Trump is surrounded by anti-China ideologues who seek its containment, strategic competition, and confrontation.

Don't force our allies and partners in the region to choose between China and the US. Our best diplomacy, and that's a problem, should be oriented on being assertive with China, but not confrontational, and supportive of our partners in the region. To that end, I see the US-Australia relationship as remaining strong at the US and American level, and Trump has nominated a good man to be Ambassador, a Republican of the George H.W. Bush mold.

Conflict with China is not inevitable in the face of Graham Allison's recent book and the theory of the Thucydides Trap. This is why we must manage inevitable confrontation with China to prevent conflict between two thermo-nuclear powers.

It's not clear what the ascension of President Xi means. The 19th Party Congress was a clear turning point for China. Whether this places China and Xi and the CCP on a collision course with the US, or on a path to cooperation with the US, remains TBD. There may be a diminishing maneuver space for Xi in his empowered capacity to compromise on trade.

The US/Soviet Cold War was an ideological struggle with a thermo-nuclear superpower, but also with an economic Lilliputian: the USSR. Deng Xiaoping saw the ideological struggle as a trap for China, from which it could not extricate itself, and would be a source of near constant confrontation with the US that could be avoided.

Under Deng and his successors, during the so-called "hide and bide" era in China, the US and China relationship was defined far more by our shared economic interests rather than by our political differences. And yes, there were and remain prominent tensions between us, notably on human rights, but we were talking, and our economies created the basis for engagement. Now, that dimension of the relationship is under direct attack by President Trump using terms like trade war, proclaiming them to be "easy," and claiming China is "raping" the American economy. How will China react to this? How much trade space does an empowered Xi have to deal with and perhaps accommodate Trump's demands before he begins to appear weak, even though he is massively empowered by his own hand. What's the tipping point?

Time this evening precludes my addressing every component of what I've laid out, except to say, while we view the US-China relationship as the *consequential* relationship of the 21st Century, we view the US-India relationship as the *indispensable* relationship of the 21st Century, but it's years from becoming the centerpiece of US Indo-Pacific policy we hope it can become.

Russia, we view as a hostile state while it's governed by Vladimir Putin. It's actions, from Crimea to the Donbas, to the Black Sea, to support for Bashar al-Assad, to its strategic influence operations against the US and Europe, have marked it as a threat to US national security, at a time when the US president still denies Russian meddling in the 2016 election, and seems bent on the creation of a special relationship with Putin. The Helsinki summit was a setback in the history of the American presidency.

For the foreseeable future, the US-European relationship remains at the heart of the major US relationships in the 21st Century, but with the Trump Administration disinclined to multilateralism, and its ambivalence toward NATO, with the EU and the UK in the throes of BREXIT, with other severe economic stresses within the EU, and a general drift toward right wing illiberalism in European politics, the transatlantic relationship is fraying and it will not get better under this Administration.

And finally, Brookings is tracking an important emerging 21st Century trend: the rise of digital governance in direct competition with traditional principles of Westphalian governance. The one exists in the increasingly all-pervasive cyber domain of the 21st Century, while the other exists in the physical domain of traditional governance.

Given the role of the internet, and social media, and the explosion of the availability of network capable devices, the capacity of the digital giants to touch vast swaths of global populations, in effect leveraging their attention and turning them into digital citizens of social media platforms versus national citizens of traditional governments, we find the emergence of digital governance will force redefinitions of sovereignty, and will reduce the traditional capacities of Westphalian governments to govern, especially in the developing world.

Shifting a bit to my other major area this evening, in terms of the US and American leadership in Middle East, the challenges have been and will continue to be enormous.

The so-called Arab Spring of 2010/11 signaled the widespread failure of Arab governance and set in motion seismic events that either up-ended multiple regimes, created several on-going civil wars, and shook the remaining states to their core. Syria and Yemen are two of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes in the world today, with no easy resolution in sight for either, and even when solved, what will be the butcher's bill? The on-going cold/hot war between the Saudi-led Sunni states and Iran will continue to define many of the dynamics of the region.

To that end, the US walking away from the JCPOA with Iran may turn out to be the biggest mistake of the major policy failures so far in this Administration.

And finally, under the Trump administration, seeking the Kushner-led so-called "deal of the century", defining the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, continues to languish. The binational solution sought by some will not work and will spell the end of the Zionist dream of a democratic, Jewish state. And I must add here that I don't view the term Zionism in the pejorative manner it's frequently used. Only the two-state solution will work to the long-term strategic benefit of both the Israelis and the Palestinians, and the likelihood of that fades each day with the planting of additional settlements on the West Bank.

Again, to be fair, this President inherited some nearly vertical diplomatic and security challenges, but he made subsequent decisions, siding with Mohammad bin Salman, moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem, zeroing our commitment to UNWRA, and walking away from the JCPOA, that will reap this Administration, and sadly the rest of us, some very difficult times ahead.

I've sought tonight to portray the nearly wicked problem of the in-stride shift from traditional American leadership in the world to the era of President Trump. It's unknown what the long-term effects of this presidency will be, but the reality is the challenges we face as a community of nations are crowding in upon us more and more every day, and the absence of US leadership has created severe constraints on

multilateral approaches, while also creating openings for alternative sources of influence – the Chinese approach, and Chinese alternative model, being preeminent among them.

Those of us who work these issues every day feel confident that there will be a “day after” for the Trump Administration, where traditional American leadership will be broadly synchronous once again with US leadership. As I said before, our level of confidence is high in this regard, but repairing the damage inside the US and overseas may take years.

The irony is the US is going to need help restoring these relationships and, in that regard, allies and friends will, in a very real way, become the “keepers of the flames” of our long-term bilateral relationships. In the context of the Five Eyes countries, and, in particular with Australia, this will be, perhaps, easier as these relationships can likely weather the current environment. In other spaces – economic areas, agreement and treaty relationships, and geographic relationships – this will be problematic, and maybe impossible to restore the status quo ante. As I said at the beginning of my remarks this evening: *If the Americans and the English are two peoples uniquely separated by a common language, I hope history will record that Americans and Australians were uniquely united by a common purpose.*

In the “day after” environment that’s coming, the world will desperately need strong foundational relationships which still represent the values-based norms that provided the grand strategic context prior to the period which is defining this era. One of those relationships must be that strong US-Australian bond that was, is, and will continue to be central to the security of both nations and to the stability of East Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. I hope, and I pray, that our common purpose, forged in long eras of peace, war, and crisis, will not just benefit our two peoples, but will be, in the reckoning of history, that great aggregation of good that lifted up the human experiment.

I’m sorry for going on so long this evening. God bless our two countries.