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Visions of the World and the U.S. Role in It
Remarks to the Myra Kraft Open Classroom at Northeastern University

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Chris has asked me to lay out the foreign policy issues the next president will face upon taking office this coming January. If you go by what each candidate has said, she or he just needs to kill a few foreign leaders and renegotiate some alliances and trade deals. But there are some other urgent decisions to be made:

√ whether to implement or scuttle the Paris climate agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran or abandon these accords to their congressional and other saboteurs;

√ what to do about north Korea's emerging capability to fire nuclear warheads at U.S. cities:

√ whether to follow up or cancel our partial opening to Cuba;

√ how to conduct our foreign policies in the face of a likely avalanche of foreign law suits reciprocating those just authorized under the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA) and seeking damages from the United States, Israel, the U.K. and their officials for multiple alleged acts of state terrorism;

√ whether to escalate U.S. intervention in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and elsewhere in the Muslim world or try some other means of neutralizing the threat of Islamist terrorists to our country:

√ what to do about Ukraine, its relationship to the rest of Europe and Russia, the role of Russia to the European state system, and the rising danger of U.S. nuclear war with Russia;

√ whether to continue to escalate our military confrontation with China in its near seas and how to react to the Philippines' apparent decision to drop out of that confrontation;

√ what to do about Brexit and the progressive unraveling of the European project;

√ how to restructure our European and Asian alliances and the division of labor within them:

√ how to deal with alienated American allies and protectorates like Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt;

√ whether and how we can continue to protect the State of Israel from international condemnation and punitive sanctions directed at its flagrant violations of human rights and international law in Palestine;

√ what to do about our co-belligerent complicity in alleged war crimes in Yemen and Syria; and

√ whatever the crisis *du jour* turns out to be, plus all the issues the incumbent administration and its predecessors have sought to finesse rather than resolve – like climate change and arms control. There's quite a list of such issues. So the new administration will have its hands full.

I look forward to discussing all these issues and others with my fellow panelists and you when we get to the Q & A period.

But, rather than going through a checklist of specific issues now, I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about the broad question of what kind of statecraft the United States must develop and practice to deal with the new world disorder. The specific issues I've listed (and I could have gone on) strike me as microcosms of structural changes in the world political-economy that need to be put in broader perspective. So bear with me as I spend a few minutes talking about the changing world order and some of its implications for our foreign policies.

I was born after the failure of isolationism, in the middle of our country's initially reluctant involvement in World War II. When the war ended, it fell to the United States -- which then accounted for about half of the world economy -- and to the Russian-led Soviet Union -- which accounted for about one-eighth -- to shape a new international system. In practice, Washington and Moscow set aside the vision of great-power management of a harmonious world through the United Nations and divided the world between us. In its sphere of influence, each superpower enforced its politico-economic ideology and – to one extent or another – disciplined the foreign and domestic behavior of component states and their leaders.

Within the U.S. sphere, with British help, Americans created and led institutions like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, later the World Trade Organization). These enshrined the U.S. dollar as a universal, benchmark currency, promoted market economics, and sustained the capitalist system in the so-called "free world." The U.S. armed forces did not come home. They remained abroad to man the ramparts of the worldwide American sphere of influence, composed of NATO in Europe, bilateral protectorates over Japan and Korea in Northeast Asia, and the inclusion of many Southeast, South, and West Asian countries in the now-forgotten Southeast Asian and Central Treaty Organizations (SEATO and CENTO).

Despite occasional talk of "rollback," both the stated and operative objectives of U.S. policy were "containment," a

strategy of active diplomatic and military defense calculated to preclude any shift in the borders between the U.S. and Soviet spheres and to wall up the Soviet Union until the inherent defects of its system eventually brought it down. It took a two generations for the USSR actually to fulfill this destiny by imploding. That was plenty of time for a distinctive American school of hegemonic statecraft to take shape. During the Cold War, the United States came:

√ to insist on its own natural right of leadership and to oppose the prospect of change instigated by others as a potential zero-sum disturbance of the global balance and order;

√ to make deterrence (i.e. the use of threats to freeze potentially explosive situations) and military intervention its habitual responses to efforts by others to alter the status quo in any region of the world;

√ to see “diplomacy” between great powers primarily as a way of communicating determination to obstruct or preempt efforts by others to assert themselves internationally, not as a means of resolving problems to eliminate their eventual explosion or emergence as a casus belli;

√ to lump together all states it had pledged to protect as so-called “allies,” erasing traditionally vital distinctions between “allies” with reciprocal, contractual defense obligations, “protectorates” with no such obligations, dependent “client states” with little or no capacity for effective self-defense, and geopolitically important but strategically uncooperative “non-aligned states;”

√ to apply coercive measures like sanctions and threats to use force against recalcitrant states in preference to relying on influence born of diplomatic empathy, allurements, or incentives to motivate them to cooperate; and

√ to resort habitually to the overt or covert use of force as the most expedient and efficient way to overcome objectionable foreign behavior, unless doing so might risk nuclear retaliation.

The norms of American statecraft that I have just outlined were shaped during undeniably anomalous periods – the Cold War and the “unipolar moment” that followed it. They are notably militaristic. The world order they addressed was relatively simple.

The Soviet ideological and geopolitical challenge was the main factor guiding the U.S. response to regional and local events. And fear of the USSR was the principal stimulus to the consolidation by the industrialized democracies of an identity centered on the United States, enforcing the necessity for U.S. leadership. But now the Soviet Union and, with it, the bipolar US-Soviet order, are both gone. A multipolar international state system – with all its complexities – has succeeded bipolarity. The old ways don’t serve us well in a new context they were not designed to address.

The United States came out of the Cold War as both global hegemon and political-economic role model. In the two decades between the Soviet collapse and the global disillusionment with America that accompanied the Wall Street-induced financial crisis of 2008 - 2009, the United States thought it had all the answers and acted unilaterally

– without regard to international law or the views of its strategic partners abroad.

The complacent assumption of a world perpetually dominated by purposive U.S. centrality, Western unity, and American omnipotence has now been succeeded by American confusion about the appropriate role of the United States in world affairs, the progressive disintegration of the West, the enervation of Western-led global governance, and the attachment of a growing sense of futility to military intervention in other states and cultures. In this context, stepped-up military spending and more boots on the ground abroad are an emotionally satisfying but unrealistic evasion, not an effective response to change.

The policy approaches the United States developed in the very different circumstances of the late 20th and very early 21st centuries demonstrably do not suit the fluid strategic environment of the post-Cold War, post-bipolar world order. To be effective, American statecraft and diplomacy must revise the doctrines that guide them.

The model of global governance created by visionary American statesmen after World War II has belatedly conquered the whole world. No great power now proposes an alternative to it. Much as some alarmists would like to posit such a thing, there is no existential ideological or strategic challenge to the inherited rules of the US-backed international system, even if some, like China and India, seek to tinker with these rules to serve their interests and aspirations better and others, like Russia, feel unjustly excluded from their protections.

Countries that were willing rule-takers under the Pax Americana now understandably aspire to be rule-makers as well. If they are not admitted to such a role, they will use their growing power to work around the legacy system. If sufficiently frustrated, they can and will seek to supplant it.

To put it starkly: The United States is now part of a globalized world in which we are often not in a position to call the shots and sometimes not even first among equals. Americans developed institutions, policies, and practices to deal with a set of challenges that has vanished. We must now adapt the system we created to accommodate, incorporate, and leverage the growing wealth and power of countries like China, India, and post-Soviet Russia. If we don't do this, we will see the progressive displacement into irrelevance of what we created. In short, to ensure that the international state system we once dominated will continue to protect our interests and values, we must *facilitate* rather than oppose its evolution so that it becomes a multilaterally directed worldwide order. This will require leadership of a quality that, frankly, does not appear to be on offer in this election.

Americans are now challenged to redesign our statecraft to cope with a multipolar state system in which power is decentralizing and devolving to the regional level. World orders in which many powers compete are the historical norm. But our country has never actively participated in such an order. Americans are uncomfortable with a world in which our "allies" do not feel obliged to defend our interests and values across the board or to follow us automatically where we choose to lead.

"Alliances:" are no longer assemblies of nations united to address a common fear or promote shared values. They

have become mechanisms to assure interoperability and support *ad hoc* coalitions in times of need.

In the new world disorder, an ally or partner on one issue may be an enemy or adversary on yet another. Shifting coalitions rather than standing alliances are the norm. This new reality challenges American diplomatic doctrine to transform itself by recognizing:

√ that American interests may be permanent but, given constant shifts in international alignments and balances of political, economic, and military power in the post-Cold War world, the coalitions and relationships we need to support them cannot be. Our international partnerships require constant reassessment and adjustment;

√ that efforts to resolve problems through diplomacy, especially when one's bargaining position is likely to weaken over time, are wiser than the issuance of military threats to deter and thus defer decisions by an adversary with respect to these problems, as this just bottles them up to explode later under less favorable circumstances and with greater injury;

√ that limited rather than general partnerships or across-the-board alliances are now the international norm. Even when in most respects our relationship with another country is adversarial, Americans must be willing and able to work with it to realize or defend a shared interest of importance to us;

√ that relationships and commitments to other countries, like the international transactions they facilitate, must be evaluated in terms of what's in them for the United States and adjusted accordingly;

√ that unconditional commitments enable risk-taking and burden-shirking by foreign partners rather than responsible behavior ;

√ that diplomatic relations are not a favor we confer on other governments but a means for us to understand and influence their perceptions and behavior. In an increasingly competitive and disorderly world, the absence or suspension of diplomatic dialog is a form of unilateral disarmament; and

√ that the use of force must invariably be the last – not the first – resort of statecraft because it is so costly in blood and treasure, unpredictable in its outcomes and consequences, and destructive of domestic liberty.

To conclude: The diplomatic terrain has changed. There is no longer an American sphere of influence to defend against one organized by a hostile power. China and Russia are to one degree or another (China more than Russia) integrated into the globalized version of the old American-led system. Neither is or can be isolated. Nor are local and regional conflicts necessarily connected to great-power rivalry as they were during the Cold War, when all issues weighed in the balance between the contending U.S. and communist blocs.

As an example, consider north Korea. U.S. deterrence of Pyongyang is no longer linked to apprehension about

Chinese or Russian control of the peninsula. (Whether Korea is divided or unified has international implications, but is of vital concern only to Koreans. China has better relations with Seoul than with Pyongyang. And the nationalism of a united Korea – however unification was achieved – would more likely check than enlarge Chinese influence in northeast Asia.) Having responded to menacing U.S. containment policies by developing the capability to strike the United States directly with nuclear weapons, North Korea is now a problem for the United States in its own right, without regard to its relationships with other great powers.

Or consider Iran. U.S. tensions with Iran have to do with the history of our bilateral relations and the evolution of regional balances of power in the Middle East, including a potential nuclear balance between Israel and Iran. Russia and China have been partners with the United States in trying to mitigate the problems posed by Iran's completely independent foreign policies. Israel and Saudi Arabia have been opponents of this process. The obstacles to US-Iranian détente and rapprochement are *sui generis*, not derived from any global contest.

In the new circumstances, American diplomacy must be agile, seeking out opportunities to promote change and solve problems in ways that benefit the United States and its long-term interests, rather than attempting to frustrate proposals because they originate with or also benefit others. Our policies must derive from self-interest rather than residual paternalism or nostalgia for leadership of a sphere of influence that no longer exists. Our diplomats must be no less professional than our military. And our diplomats, not our military, must man the front lines of our defense.

One of the two major party presidential candidates is clearly committed to the problematic statecraft and militarized diplomacy of the past. The other represents an uncouth eruption of nativist complaints and politically resonant assertions unaccompanied by feasible policies or plans. Neither has offered a coherent answer to the specific issues with which I began. And neither has evidenced awareness of the need to adjust Washington's approach to our foreign relations to deal with the structural changes in the world order I have described.

The world is watching the United States and both candidates. And, frankly, it is dismayed. The damage to America's foreign relations from this election is substantial and likely to last.