



# Practical Lessons from US Foreign Policy The Itinerant Years

James E. Goodby  
Kenneth Weisbrode

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## Practical Lessons from US Foreign Policy

“This interesting book touches on a variety of critical questions about America’s role in the world since the Cold War. Even though I do not fully agree with all of its arguments, I believe it will provoke productive—and badly needed—discussion about the road traveled and the road ahead.”

—Hal Brands, *author of American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump* (2018)

“There is one immutable fact about cooperative security—when practiced well, it works. Countries can solve together problems that none of them can solve alone. Ambassador Goodby and Professor Weisbrode are superb guides through the past two decades of American policy, pointing out how cooperative security could have helped us—and still could help us—to address global challenges like nuclear proliferation and climate change.”

—Gloria Duffy, *President, The Commonwealth Club, and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense*

“The idea that America has lost its vision of global leadership has become a commonplace in the era of Trump. This thoughtful and wide-ranging compilation of op-eds reveals both the deeper history of these developments and the existence of longstanding efforts to counter them. For two decades, the esteemed diplomat-historian duo of Goodby and Weisbrode have delivered a series of prophetic warnings about the dangers and consequences of America’s failure to apply and adapt the principles of collective security—diplomacy, international institutions, and regional alliances—to a rapidly changing and globalizing world. Together with their reflections on these writings, this volume offers a nuanced assessment of the US international order that dominated the second half of the twentieth century, as well as a rebuke of the dark ‘America First’ nationalism that has reemerged in the Trump era. This sober yet ultimately hopeful book is vital reading for the current and future generation of America’s leaders and all who are dedicated to the prospect of a more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable world.”

—Hannah Gurman, *author of The Dissent Papers: The Voices of Diplomats in the Cold War and Beyond* (2012)

“This engaging collaboration of a diplomatic practitioner and a political historian offers its analysis and critique of US foreign policy—the good, the bad, and the ugly—in the years 1998–2015. Arrogance and ignorance, we learn, have appeared in American leadership predating the Trump administration.”

— Peter J. Katzenstein, *Walter S. Carpenter, Jr. Professor of International Studies, Cornell University, USA*

James E. Goodby · Kenneth Weisbrode

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The Itinerant Years

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*To me, the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons is like the top of a very tall mountain. It is tempting and easy to say: "We can't get there from here." It is true that today in our troubled world we can't see the top of the mountain. But we can see that we are heading down—not up. We can see that we must turn around, that we must take paths leading to higher ground and that we must get others to move with us.*

—Sam Nunn, 2007

*To Priscilla Goodby (1932–2018)*

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# CHRONOLOGY

- 1998 Asian and developing country financial crisis continues.  
Kosovo War begins.  
India and Pakistan test nuclear weapons.  
US embassies attacked in Kenya and Tanzania.  
Bill Clinton impeached.
- 1999 *Time* magazine anoints Alan Greenspan, Robert Rubin, and Larry Summers as the “Committee to Save the World.”  
50th anniversary of NATO coincides with attack on Serbia.  
NATO accepts three new members.  
Istanbul summit of the OSCE highlights humanitarian intervention.
- 2000 “Dot-com” bubble bursts.  
Second Intifada begins.  
George W. Bush elected president of the US.
- 2001 Al Qaeda attacks the United States.
- 2002 The United States and coalition occupy Afghanistan, later transferred to NATO.  
The United States withdraws from Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.
- 2003 The United States and coalition invade and occupy Iraq.
- 2004 NATO accepts seven new members, including former Baltic republics of USSR.  
EU accepts ten new members.  
Bush reelected president of the US.
- 2005 China and Russia conduct joint military exercises.
- 2006 North Korea conducts nuclear test.

- 2007 EU accepts two new members.  
Financial crisis begins.  
Treaty of Lisbon signed.
- 2008 Russia intervenes in Georgia.  
Barack Obama elected president of the US.
- 2009 NATO accepts two more members.  
North Korea conducts second nuclear test.  
Copenhagen climate change conference takes place.
- 2010 “Operation Iraqi Freedom” ends.
- 2011 “Arab Spring” takes place.  
US troops depart Iraq.  
Civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen begin.
- 2012 Obama reelected president.  
South China Sea dispute intensifies.
- 2013 North Korea conducts third nuclear test.  
EU accepts one more member.
- 2014 Russia intervenes in Ukraine.
- 2015 NATO troops begin to depart Afghanistan.  
Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed with Iran.  
Paris Climate Agreement negotiated.

## PART I

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## CHAPTER 1

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# How Did We Get Here?

How will people remember and describe the first couple of decades of the twenty-first century in US foreign policy? To date, there is still no slogan or epithet for them. There is no single adjective, with the partial exceptions of “post-Cold War,” still somewhat in use, or “global,” which is inadequate because few people agree when “globalization” began. Slogan setting will track what happens in the years to come: This period is likely to rate as one of the richer ones for debating the complicated relations the American people and their government have with others around with the world, and with the many issues that they try, separately and in combination, to manage and solve.

The following selection of essays is the work of two writers, Goodby, a diplomat, and Weisbrode, a historian. Our book is neither a monograph nor a social science primer on current events or on the sum of US relations (economic, cultural, scientific, etc.) with other countries. It is tailored narrowly to the topics and issues on which we specialize—diplomacy and political history—and is meant to illustrate the evolution of these aspects of foreign policy, not as substitutes for any others but as the focus of our professional analysis. Our reason for compiling it is to show how the administrations of three American presidents—Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama—disregarded or misapplied to differing degrees the main organizing principle of a peaceful and, on balance, stable world order that they inherited from the twentieth century: collective security.

What do we mean by collective security? That it must be defined at all speaks to the senility of our era, for not too long ago it was taken to be a mantra among most educated citizens. Since the 1990s, however, it has diminished to the status of a quaint relic if not otherwise taken for granted.<sup>1</sup> It prescribed something more durable than a military or political alliance or, to use the more popular term today, “partnership.” Collective security meant that security is indivisible, both geographically and functionally, in all civilian and military fields of human action. It meant alliances that are underwritten not only by treaties and other agreements and understandings, but also by multilateral institutions and, as we discuss below, international regimes that transcend defense, economics, and politics. These regimes, along with treaties, agreements, understandings, and institutions are grounded, in turn, in the realities of power, not in principled opposition to them. And those realities of power correspond to geographic, economic, and cultural affinities and relationships that are, we believe, best constructed and nurtured in and among historic regions.<sup>2</sup>

The reasons for today’s widespread neglect of such realities are debatable and complex, but on balance they come, in our view, from a combination of ignorance and arrogance, both of which have been widely and persistently noted in the administration of Donald Trump.

\* \* \*

In its foreign policy, the Trump administration follows a dark logic in its view of the world (“It’s a vicious place”—Trump). Its foreign policy could fairly be described as *Realpolitik* in its impulses but mixed in its execution of that policy. The administration’s relations with Russia and China are clearly not based on realism.

Henry Kissinger and George Kennan were proponents of realism in American foreign policy, partly in reaction to what they saw as misguided policies espoused by Woodrow Wilson and excessive US devotion to unenforceable international law, especially between the two world wars. Both Kennan and Kissinger advocated policies rooted in power politics, but both recognized the limits of American power and sought to put in place policies of containment and *détente* in dealing with the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> These policies relied on American military force for their ultimate effectiveness but depended in their day-to-day practice on American diplomacy.

Kennan and Kissinger worried that Americans would not be able to pursue a consistent foreign policy over a long period of time, given the

changing leadership and the need for public support in democratic governance. Yet from the end of the Second World War through the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a foreign policy consensus enjoyed the support of both major parties. It enabled American presidents and their cabinets and national security advisers to carry out a remarkably stable and consistent diplomacy (at least one that appears so in retrospect) in which negotiations with adversaries became an increasingly prominent component.

This generation of realists has passed from the scene.<sup>4</sup> In our essays commenting on issues of the post-Cold War period, we recorded how the single-minded focus on containment of Soviet power was gradually replaced by policies that were intended to respond to perceived new threats and opportunities. During that period, the immobility of the Cold War was superseded by a variety of threats from internal instability in strategically located nations, some of which had been subservient to the will of Moscow. International terrorism fostered by disputes in the Middle East became a major challenge to US security. Existential threats grew with the spread of nuclear weapons capabilities, climate change, and the ability of human beings to manipulate the genetic code.

US foreign policy in the twenty-first century has been confronted with challenges that few states appear to have known before. Issues that statecraft was once called upon to manage required tools that have not been well developed in the foreign policy machinery of any government. Military force could deal with some of these issues, though not in traditional ways. Others require scientific and technological skills in short supply in most governments. The implications of social media and other developments made possible by the digital revolution, like cyber war, have only begun to be incorporated into the conceptual underpinnings of foreign policy. The management of global economic integration has not yet been mastered. No wonder that governance of foreign policy seems muddled and that critics of the United States and the conduct of its foreign policy have such a rich menu of complaints.

Into this rapidly changing and not yet fully understood environment came the Trump administration, headed by a president with little experience in foreign affairs. That could have been an advantage. Fresh challenges require fresh eyes, and Trump, despite much criticism, had the political backing necessary to adopt a different set of foreign policy guidelines to respond to the complexities faced by the United States and other nations. But the principles of the administration's foreign policies had to be derived from the president's particular view of the world

and his conviction that the way to create the conditions necessary to achieve American success in foreign affairs was to begin most relationships with threats in order to extract concessions. Trump revealed in his Inaugural Address on January 20, 2017 that his attitude toward world order was probably rooted in the philosophy of the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes is best known for portraying human life as a “war of all against all.”<sup>5</sup> In Hobbes’s major book, *Leviathan*, he argued that human beings are inherently selfish and that an absolute monarchy is the only form of government capable of dealing with this situation. One can argue about Trump’s philosophy of government, but that international life is a war of all against all in his psychology is clear. “America First” is his response to this perceived state of the world. “Protection” was Trump’s answer to predatory nations out to steal America’s jobs and its wealth. Tariffs and trade wars have been the natural result.

The Trumpian outlook requires a world order in which international cooperation is a low priority and, in fact, something to be suspected. Peace is something abnormal and conflict the natural order of things. Threats are the most effective way to achieve results. International organizations are designed to restrain American freedom of action and deserve support only if America is paid for services rendered. Selfishness is the reigning human instinct and ignoring that reality can only lead to defeat in this world.

It is not critical, really, how Trump came to hold these views or whether his views correspond closely with those of a seventeenth-century philosopher. The important point is that the world order Trump perceives and accepts as normal is one very similar to the dog-eat-dog world that others before him saw and that many citizens in many countries perceive today. And they are acting on that premise.

Thus, one can observe a strong impulse in Europe, in the Western Hemisphere, in Russia, and in China, the latter of which not too long ago was called “the honor student in the school of globalization,” for a world order that is based on the ideas that conflict is normal and cooperation unnatural, and that self-interest narrowly conceived outweighs any appeal to generosity or even empathy.<sup>6</sup> In a foreign policy resting on such a philosophy, demonstrated increasingly and vividly to friends and foes alike during Trump’s first term in office, there is very little room for ethical and moral principles in the creation of a foreign policy. That does not mean that principles were not being established. They boil down to

“Never trust any other nation and do unto them before they do unto you.” This is not the type of realism that George Kennan and Henry Kissinger practiced. Both men recognized that to be successful and, above all, to be sustainable, US foreign policy had to be consistent with, or at least pay regular homage to, the American people’s self-identification as a moral nation.

Have the American people always reacted to external events in ways that were ethical and based on religious or moral principles? No, of course not, although perhaps more self-consciously than many other nations. But their lapses from justice and ethical behavior were seen as lapses, especially in retrospect, rather than as proper behavior justified by American needs at the time. Cold War foreign policy was able to be as consistent, and in the end as successful, as it was because the American people thought of it as morally correct. American presidents spoke of it that way, too.

Trump’s sense of ethics is summed up in his slogans: “Make America Great Again” and “America First.” He proclaimed himself a “nationalist.” Not for him what previous generations of American leaders thought of as “enlightened self-interest.” Their idea was that America could thrive best in a world where many nations and peoples shared the ideas upon which the United States was founded. American leaders sought to support democratic nations and movements, not just as a bulwark against adversaries in the Kremlin and elsewhere but most importantly because they were dedicated to building a world order based on democratic principles. Perhaps this was itself a form of imperialism, but if so, as was said of British colonialism, it was a self-liquidating form of imperialism.<sup>7</sup>

“Where there is no vision, the people perish” was one of John F. Kennedy’s favorite biblical quotations. The vision of most American presidents of the twentieth century was a world in which the United States would thrive and prosper among a universe of like-minded nations.<sup>8</sup> Even adversaries, it was hoped, would someday become persuaded of the righteousness of that vision: “The end of history,” as Francis Fukuyama put it when it seemed to have turned out that way.

The Trumpian vision has not embraced Fukuyama’s liberal democratic notion and, hence, the norms that go with it. Most previous administrations sought to put in place internationally accepted norms designed to build a global liberal democratic system, but Trump has set about to destroy those norms. What the consequences of this will be is a profound question with long-term implications for the United States and other nations.

International regimes are what govern or at least influence the foreign policy behavior of most nations that are active participants in an international system of nations. An international regime is not a treaty but rather a set of norms that participants in an international system expect will predict the normal response of any one of them to an issue or decision point that arises within the system. An example of an international regime is that of nations engaged with each other under the terms of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and its supporting agreements and executive machinery.

The NPT provides the basic framework, but periodic review conferences, a supplier group, and many aspects of the civil uses of nuclear energy are all part of the international regime that influences how nations will behave under certain circumstances. Regimes lend predictability and stability to international systems and hence are an important part of any world order.<sup>9</sup> By challenging many of the international regimes that have governed the way nations behave, Trump has introduced major uncertainties into the international system with which the United States has been involved. The United Nations has long been a favored target for scapegoating; this now extends to other international organizations and bodies, including the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Such attempts at organizational delegitimation have affected international security and international trade and finance in ways that raise questions about the future viability of those international regimes. The question that only history will be able to answer is whether the national interests of the United States in the future have been well served by this attack on current international regimes and world order.

The essays reproduced in this volume illustrate a set of assumptions and expectations about such regimes and international order. There was a consensus among policymakers in the United States, with very few exceptions, that international cooperation was essential to deal with the challenges and opportunities that technology had created. This consensus applied both to trade and finance and to security issues. The consensus accepted the need for institutions to support international cooperation. And it accepted the need for a leading role by the United States in creating an international environment, now known as the global commons, to update and expand the institutions created in the twentieth century, which were rooted in the West and which were seen as

increasingly inadequate to meet global economic, security, and technological challenges.<sup>10</sup>

In the United States, Trump ran against that consensus—and won. The consensus evidently had feet of clay.<sup>11</sup> It was not shared by the majority of his supporters, who carried the election in several states. Globalization was not providing economic benefits directly to some of these people. Instead, the income gap between the middle class and the managers and promoters of globalization was widening as wages for the middle class stagnated for several years and upward mobility stalled.

It is now an open question whether the consensus that globalization is beneficial for all citizens, not just for the elite upper crust, may ever be reached. A global community cannot be restored since it never was accepted in the first place. Perhaps it can be created if globalization and its domestic component can create wealth that is shared more fully by the middle class, however many people globalization brings out of poverty.<sup>12</sup> To accomplish that goal, a number of ideas and institutionalized habits that seem to have their roots in earlier beliefs that were widely shared by American citizens and which have been reinforced during the last few years will have to be renewed. One of these beliefs is popular consent.

Technologies offer the means of expressing consent, but new methods of communications also have undermined representative democracy as it has been practiced in the United States and elsewhere. Social media have empowered individual citizens who can now share their opinions with millions of other citizens. Powerful officials, including the President of the United States, can now convey their views to millions of people around the world without the benefit of expert advice or the simultaneous filtering of the media. As predicted by James Madison in *Federalist* Number 10, this widespread practice of a form of direct democracy has led to factionalism on a vast scale. Moreover, technology is now introducing artificial intelligence and new means of producing goods and services into the economies of the United States and other technologically advanced nations.

Revolutionary developments in communications and means of production could be supremely beneficial to humanity if their introduction into national and global societies were governed with wisdom and a respect for freedom, democracy, and other human values. At the moment, there is room for doubt that this will be the case. The

empowerment of individuals offered by both of these technologies appears to be leading toward anarchy, nihilism, and the spread of dangerous weapons into the hands of individuals and small groups of ambitious people.

There is incoherent public debate about these developments, although the use of social media platforms for spreading malicious lies which undermine democracies has become an issue in the public arena. Instead of encouraging social media to be an asset to the practice of democracy, the tendency is to see social media as the enemy and as the promoter of factionalism among citizens. Surely, there is a need to adapt democratic institutions to new means of direct communication. Representative government should be able to utilize these new channels to seek consensus on major issues and thus enhance, rather than undermine, democratic practices. It would mean more openness about decision making, but that should be a positive element. Similarly, the new technology of three-dimensional printing, which already is being used to produce many objects, could be further used to build localized, decentralized production centers. In some ways, this could encourage communities to remain as viable centers of economic life, like the cottage industries of the pre-industrial revolution era. There are plenty of old ideas around, too, which the new technologies are making more practical and realizable. The old ideas of a guaranteed annual income for all citizens, which has been regarded as too costly to be practical, now may become a necessity as artificial intelligence coupled with robotics shifts the balance of economic power further toward capital and away from labor.

Fanciful? Perhaps, but there is a crying need to think more about how to channel technological change into forces to undergird democracy rather than undermine it.

It usually is better to add before subtracting in social and political relationships. Yet, the use of the terms “globalism” and “globalist,” the latter a pejorative word in the Trump White House, implies that the process of global economic integration is one policy choice among many and that it can be discarded or ignored at will. That is not true. What is true is that nations can resist global economic integration or try to organize alternatives to it. But technology has created the means that make global economic integration possible, and the process of economic growth and integration has lifted people out of poverty in many parts of

the world. Disrupting that process is possible for large economies like the United States but it comes at a cost, both to wealth creation and to international relations. What we discuss, then, is not just a policy choice but a condition of contemporary life. The choice is not simply between favoring or opposing international economic integration but between radically different forms of world order.

A debate over world order is not the way the arguments about the current international disorder are being framed. The most common way to describe such disorder is as a rising tide of populism generated by economic pressures brought on by global economic growth and integration, and the dislocations being felt by waves of migrants. When German Chancellor Angela Merkel responded to migration within her understanding of a cooperative world order, she was denounced by those who saw a different world order. But they were called “populists,” which misses the point. The danger in missing the point is that the wrong responses will be advanced to deal with the truly grave international crisis our country is facing.

The world structure that has been emerging in recent decades resembles what Hedley Bull described as a “new medievalism.”<sup>13</sup> Technology has empowered private institutions (“Big Tech”) in a way that has created a power center like that of the great barons of European medieval times. International institutions created to enhance cooperation among nations have taken on a resemblance to the church in medieval Europe in that they exert moral and political influence on public policies and attitudes without having economic or military power. The third tier of the power structure of medieval Europe consisted of the sovereigns of each state. Yet each source of state power derived from the other centers, particularly when each depended upon technological progress. That, in turn, depended for its sustenance upon a degree of openness and collaboration.

So, today, national governments exercise great power but, as in medieval times, are generally required to share power with other institutions if governance is to function most effectively. “Contemporary states,” therefore, “exist in a world order structured by norms of the international system, yet are correspondingly impacted by transnational pressures that override sovereign borders.”<sup>14</sup> The more that states push against the trend of shared governance, the more governments come to realize that “it is precisely these market dynamics... that anchor state sovereignty

but, paradoxically, also delimit the potential scope of state effectiveness.”<sup>15</sup> There is a crisis of global governance which makes it more difficult for national governments to come to grips with the international crisis they all face—that of building a world order based on cooperation, not conflict. The two conditions—cooperation and conflict—are interrelated but also are essentially and functionally different in how they characterize an international system. Conflict, many scholars have argued, is the norm, cooperation the exception. We would not go this far but do draw a somewhat related distinction: Cooperation requires more creative effort than conflict—at least at the outset. In time, cooperation may become less exceptional and more normal.

The modern world, it is said, has moved beyond the rivalrous nature of its medieval ancestor. Power can at once be tamed, mastered, and mobilized for the common good. Human progress can dictate its exercise more than the reverse. “[P]olitical equilibrium in international affairs is possible without a balance of power, and more easily attained without balance-of-power methods,” the historian Paul W. Schroeder has written, “and that international politics, even if they remain structurally anarchic... can none the less be restrained by consensus and bounded by law.”<sup>16</sup> There is more to this point than what is, or used to be, commonly known as a harmony of interests. The intellectual and practical task of harmonizing interests is made more difficult by a misapprehension, held even among sophisticated observers, of what “world order” even means. Adam Tooze, another historian, has written, “What history actually suggests is that order tends to emerge not from cooperation and deliberation but from a cruder calculus of power and material constraints.”<sup>17</sup> Power and principle do not always align well with technology, and the misalignments may be tragic, but that need not mean that each negates the inherent value of the other. Perhaps the Davos generation of financial, political, and social entrepreneurs of the 1990s—who once prided themselves on “disruption” and imparted to their successors a more anarchic world than the one they inherited—may someday be forgiven for overlooking this basic point of history.<sup>18</sup> That diplomats and historians may similarly overlook this point is unforgivable.

It is these twin crises, of order and governance, not populism, that represent the problem national leaders should be facing. National debates are needed about governance in today’s world and about what kind of world order will most benefit the nations. Other debates are about symptoms, not causes, although the symptoms are exacerbated

by existential threats that cannot be effectively dealt with under the restraints imposed by inadequate governance.

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What is the precise cause of today's crisis of order and governance? One answer is rooted in the adversarial tradition on which American law and politics are built, and so too a long-standing tendency to regard foreign policy in principle as distinctly "foreign" and in practice as "domestic." That is, to perpetuate a view of the world that sees it divided between us-and-them, while, at the same time, advancing or rejecting policies on the basis of how well or how poorly they play to domestic audiences. America is not unique in this respect.

We do not limit this charge to parochial, opportunistic politicians. It is also prevalent among the self-appointed guardians of foreign policy—government officials, scholars, journalists, activists of various colors, and so on—who spent a good deal of their time talking to, past, and against one another, and have been accused, not without reason, of seeing the world like a giant laboratory in which to test, support, or oppose various nostrums.<sup>19</sup>

As of the time of writing, it is too soon to tell whether the rhetoric and policy of the Trump administration really do represent a significant break from the past, or whether they are merely a more extreme form of myopia. Historians someday may see it as a bit of both. Thus, we decided upon preparing this retrospective to pose a related question: *How did we get here?*

Specifically, how did what appeared to many people a couple of decades ago to be a bright and promising future become so bleak and hostile? How did the exercise or non-exercise of US power contribute to that result? To restate some jargon of the post-Cold War years, one might ask, did unipolarity dictate the adoption of unilateralism? If so, when and how? By contrast, when and how did an American retreat, if it is accurate to call it that, begin, and why?

It has become a commonplace to say that retreat began about a decade ago during the presidency of Barack Obama as an overreaction to the unilateralism of his predecessor, George W. Bush, and the mistakes of the Bush administration in its "war on terror."<sup>20</sup> It is even more of a commonplace to claim that each administration, rightly or wrongly, sets out to reverse, refute, or otherwise draw distinctions between itself and the one(s) that came before. This is because politicians generally like to make good on their campaign promises, and because most