



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on January 18, 2017

At World Economic Forum in Davos, Biden Urges Defense of “Liberal International Order”

Speaking at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, on January 18, Vice President Joe Biden said, “It is imperative that we act urgently to defend the liberal international order.” Biden went on to use the phrase “liberal international order” eight times in his 2,725-word speech, starting early on with:



Our careful attention to building and sustaining a liberal international order — with the United States and Europe at its core — was the bedrock of the success the world enjoyed in the second half of the 20th Century.

Taken in its historical context, the above reference to a “core” could only pertain to the establishment of NATO in 1949, when it was comprised of the United States, Canada, and 10 European nations. Those who remember the Cold War recall NATO as an alliance of free nations created to defend Western Europe from potential aggression by the Eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union. Few people realized what NATO was, however. Articles 52-54 of the UN Charter authorize forming “Regional Arrangements,” which is precisely what NATO is.

On March 19, 1949, Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated that the NATO pact was “designed to fit precisely into the framework of the United Nations,” that it was “subject to the overriding provisions of the United Nations,” and that it “is an essential measure for strengthening the United Nations.”

Going back to Biden’s speech, his preferred term “liberal international order” is a variation of a more familiar phrase, “new world order,” which he probably avoided because it tends to raise red flags among those who are concerned about the seven-decades-long efforts of internationalists to create a world government (“new world order”) under the auspices of the United Nations. The above-quoted Dean Acheson, who observed that NATO was essential for strengthening the UN, was — in addition to being a top proponent of creating NATO — a creator of the Marshall Plan, and was the top State Department delegate at the 1944 Bretton Woods conference, held to regulate the international monetary and financial order after the conclusion of World War II.

Though not mentioning Acheson by name, Biden alluded to his work in his speech, stating: “We need to tap into the big-heartedness that conceived a Marshall Plan, the foresight that planned a Bretton Woods, the audacity that proposed a United Nations.”

That one sentence encompassed a virtual internationalists’ delight of “new world order” programs, about which Biden lamented: “Of course, there are those who do not share this vision for the world.”

It is also worth examining Biden’s claim that the “liberal international order” (which, as we concluded, was built on NATO and the UN) “was the bedrock of the success the world enjoyed in the second half of



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the 20th Century.”

The second half of the 20th century began in 1950, which happens to be the year the United States entered the war in Korea as the principal partner in the United Nations Command, which pursued military operations against the North Koreans. The aforementioned Acheson had counseled President Truman to enter the war.

During the following years of the 20th century and into the 21st, the United States would send troops to fight in other undeclared military operations in Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. All of these operations relied on UN resolutions, rather than congressional declarations of war, for authorization. Several of them relied on NATO forces to accomplish their military objectives.

An [article posted by The New American](#) in 2002 made a case that NATO had effectively become the UN’s military arm. The article quoted a statement from military theorist James J. Schneider, who, in his article “Ambushing the Future” for the April 1995 issue of *Strategic Warfare* magazine, noted that “the future will be dominated by a single overwhelming presence — the United Nations.” Schneider, recognizing the UN’s inability to have its own military force, added, “Even now we can anticipate the transformation of NATO from a regional security arrangement to a future role as the UN’s military arm.”

In Biden’s view, more than half a century of continual wars around the globe, all authorized by UN resolutions and many fought by NATO forces at the behest of the UN, can be viewed as an example of the “success” of the “liberal international order.”

While Biden merely alluded to NATO early in his speech, he went on to champion the UN arrangement by name, saying that “the single greatest bulwark for our transatlantic partnership is the unshakable commitment of the United States to all our NATO Allies.” He affirmed what many American noninterventionists object to concerning our involvement in such alliances:

An attack on one is an attack on all. That can never be called into question. And we must continue to stand with Ukraine as they resist Russia’s acts of aggression and pursue their European path.

Such interventionism clearly disregards the sage advice offered by two of our nation’s Founding Fathers. George Washington said in his farewell address: “It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliance with any portion of the foreign world.” And Thomas Jefferson, pledged in his first inaugural address: “Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations — entangling alliances with none.”

At one time, our governments followed such wise advice. But the age of interventionism that commenced with Woodrow Wilson, resumed with Franklin D. Roosevelt, and has continued from Harry S. Truman until the present day, steered our path in another direction. The members of the American First Committee that opposed U.S. entry into World War II in 1940 were called “isolationists,” and modern-day advocates of a noninterventionist foreign policy, such as former representative and presidential candidate Ron Paul, have been branded with that same label.

Biden continued such branding in his speech, stating:

Popular movements on both the left and the right have demonstrated a dangerous willingness to revert to political small- mindedness — to the same nationalist, protectionist, and isolationist agendas that led the world to consume itself in war during in the last century.



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As we have seen time and again throughout history, demagogues and autocrats have emerged — seeking to capitalize on people's insecurities.

In this case, using Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, or xenophobic rhetoric to stoke fear, sow division, and advance their own narrow agendas.

This is a politics at odds with our values and with the vision that built — and sustains — the liberal international order.

The impulse to hunker down, shut the gates, build walls, and exit at this moment is precisely the wrong answer.

Biden asserted that the Atlantic Alliance (NATO) “is still the bedrock of addressing so many 21st Century threats — from terrorism to the spread of diseases like Ebola to climate change.”

He also correctly noted that our nation's “commitment to Europe and NATO is thoroughly bipartisan,” though the Republicans he named as agreeing with his views on NATO were of the neoconservative stripe. For example:

Just last month, my good friend and frequent sparring partner, Republican Senator John McCain traveled to Estonia where he said: “The best way to prevent Russian misbehavior [is] by having a credible, strong military and a strong NATO alliance.”

Biden said at the beginning of his speech that he wanted to make it clear that he was not referring to the imminent transition of power in his country, which provides him with deniability should anyone accuse him of directing his remarks toward president-elect Trump. That does not preclude a certain amount of reading between the lines, however.

Since a substantial portion of Biden's speech can be viewed as a defense of NATO and U.S. interventionism on behalf of NATO members in the event of Russian encroachment, it is worth considering what Trump has said about NATO.

An article in the British *Guardian* six months ago noted that Trump — while not advocating U.S. withdrawal from the alliance, which would effectively destroy it — “has suggested that under his leadership America would not necessarily come to the aid of a NATO ally under attack, saying he would first consider how much they have contributed to the alliance.”

Trump's position, however, was based mostly on economic considerations rather than an avoidance of “entangling alliances.” He believes that the other NATO members have not paid their fair share of the collective defense costs incurred by the alliance.

A more recent article in *Forbes* on January 15 quoted a statement Trump made in an interview that day with Germany's *Bild* and Britain's *Times* of London. During that interview, Trump said that while the trans-Atlantic military alliance is important, it “has problems.”

“It's obsolete, first because it was designed many, many years ago,” Trump said in the *Bild* version of the interview. “Secondly, countries aren't paying what they should,” and NATO “didn't deal with terrorism.” The *Times* quoted Trump saying that only five NATO members are paying their fair share.

During the interview, Trump also praised Britain's decision to leave the EU.

There is nothing to indicate that the Trump administration will merit the noninterventionist label that might be applied to a Ron Paul or a Rand Paul. But neither is Trump likely to be an enthusiastic defender of Biden's “liberal international order.”



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