



Trump Delivers “America First” Foreign Policy Speech

Speaking at Washington’s Mayflower Hotel on April 27, the GOP’s front-running presidential candidate Donald Trump delivered a major speech outlining his plans “to shake the rust off America’s foreign policy.” Trump began by saying his “foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else.”



Before getting down to specifics, Trump evoked some of America’s past foreign policy accomplishments, harkening back to the 1940s when “the greatest generation beat back the Nazis and Japanese imperialists” and continuing with the battle against “totalitarianism and communism” when “Democrats and Republicans working together got Mr. Gorbachev to heed the words of President Reagan, our great president, when he said, tear down this wall.”

Of course, while such phraseology makes for good sound bites, it overlooks the fact that communists still rule China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba overtly, and that former KGB Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Putin is currently president of Russia. However, much of what Trump went on to say was worth listening to, even though his timing of events was off. For example, he said “after the Cold War our foreign policy veered badly off course.” Which is true, except that our foreign policy had gone “badly off course” as far back as 1950, when President Truman sent U.S. troops to Korea under UN command and without a congressional declaration of war.

Trump went on to identify “one foreign policy disaster after another”:

They just kept coming and coming. We went from mistakes in Iraq to Egypt to Libya, to President Obama’s line in the sand in Syria. Each of these actions have helped to throw the region into chaos and gave ISIS the space it needs to grow and prosper. Very bad. It all began with a dangerous idea that we could make western democracies out of countries that had no experience or interests in becoming a western democracy.

We tore up what institutions they had and then were surprised at what we unleashed. Civil war, religious fanaticism, thousands of Americans killed and just lives, lives, lives wasted. Horribly wasted. Many trillions of dollars were lost as a result. The vacuum was created that ISIS would fill. Iran, too, would rush in and fill that void much to their really unjust enrichment.

He then went on to identify what he described as “five main weaknesses” in our foreign policy:

First, our resources are totally over extended. President Obama has weakened our military by



weakening our economy. He's crippled us with wasteful spending, massive debt, low growth, a huge trade deficit and open borders....

Secondly, our allies are not paying their fair share.... In NATO, for instance, only 4 of 28 other member countries besides America, are spending the minimum required 2 percent of GDP on defense....

Thirdly, our friends are beginning to think they can't depend on us.... [President Obama] negotiated a disastrous deal with Iran, and then we watched them ignore its terms even before the ink was dry. Obama gutted our missile defense program and then abandoned our missile defense plans with Poland and the Czech Republic. He supported the ouster of a friendly regime in Egypt that had a longstanding peace treaty with Israel, and then helped bring the Muslim Brotherhood to power in its place.

Israel, our great friend and the one true democracy in the Middle East has been snubbed and criticized by an administration that lacks moral clarity....

Fourth, our rivals no longer respect us.... When President Obama landed in Cuba on Air Force One, no leader was there, nobody, to greet him....

Finally, America no longer has a clear understanding of our foreign policy goals.... One day, we're bombing Libya and getting rid of a dictator to foster democracy for civilians. The next day, we're watching the same civilians suffer while that country falls and absolutely falls apart. We're a humanitarian nation, but the legacy of the Obama-Clinton interventions will be weakness, confusion and disarray, a mess. We've made the Middle East more unstable and chaotic than ever before. We left Christians subject to intense persecution and even genocide.

Those used to Trump's usual freewheeling style may have been surprised with his more controlled delivery during his speech, which might be attributed to his use of a teleprompter. However, coming one day after his victories in all five Eastern state primaries, Trump may have advanced to the point where he can taste victory and feels obligated to present a more "presidential" image that will play better in the general election against the presumed Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton.

One portion of Trump's speech is was particularly quoteworthy, since he expressed some thoughts sure to resonate with noninterventionists and all who want to use U.S. resources to protect America, not the entire world:

No country has ever prospered that failed to put its own interests first. Both our friends and our enemies put their countries above ours and we, while being fair to them, must start doing the same. We will no longer surrender this country or its people to the false song of globalism. The nation-state remains the true foundation for happiness and harmony. I am skeptical of international unions that tie us up and bring America down and will never enter.... And under my administration, we will never enter America into any agreement that reduces our ability to control our own affairs.

While those who have long supported noninterventionists such as former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) would agree with those statements, it remains to be seen if Trump's skepticism of international unions is as consistent as Paul's, especially considering that in his complaint about our allies not paying their fair share — wherein he noted that only four of 28 other NATO member countries besides the United States are spending the minimum required two percent of GDP on defense — he did not even hint that the United States should withdraw from NATO, which would effectively kill the alliance.



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In contrast, a year ago, while speaking on the *Alan Colmes Show*, when Colmes asked Paul if NATO should be shut down, Paul replied:

Yeah, NATO for me is one of those entangling alliances that our Founders suggested we not get involved in. And, you know, Robert Taft was from the Old Right, which was more libertarian. Under the circumstances following World War II, he advised us not to get into NATO because it would invite more problems. And I think NATO is part of the reason we go into Libya, into Syria, now in Ukraine. And that's all under NATO, It's really not checking in with the American people whether it's a good idea or not. I think that NATO's an entangling alliance that we would be better off without.

Then there is the United Nations, the "granddaddy" of all international unions, of which NATO is "regional arrangement" under Articles 52-54 of the UN Charter. NATO could accurately be called the UN's "military arm." When he was in Congress, Paul introduced the "The American Sovereignty Restoration Act" to effect U.S. withdrawal from the UN several times.

Trump has criticized the UN on occasion. Most recently, reported *The Hill* on March 21, he lashed out at the UN at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference in Washington: "The United Nations is not a friend of democracy. It's not a friend to freedom.... It's not a friend even to the United States of America, where as we all know, it has its home. And it surely isn't a friend to Israel."

Trump continued to say that any deal arranged by the UN to force an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian authority should be blocked, as it "will only further delegitimize [sic] Israel and it would reward Palestinian terrorism."

However, he has never even hinted that the United States should withdraw from the UN.

Very early in his speech, Trump said: "America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration," and journalists quickly seized on that phrase, using it in headlines above news stories about "Trump's 'America first' speech."

While the term "American First" may be new to many Americans, its usage was explained very thoroughly by James Kitfield, a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress, who is also a member of the interventionist Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in an article for Yahoo News headlined "Trump's 'America First' neo-isolationism." Kitfield wrote:

Putting America first hardly seems a controversial idea for a U.S. president, but the phrase has a long lineage in Republican politics dating back to the isolationist, noninterventionist wing of the party in the 1930s and 1940s. The America First Committee of the 1930s [the AFC was established on September 4, 1940] was established to keep the United States out of the approaching Second World War, and its noninterventionist agenda was embraced by Republican Sen. Robert Taft, who ran for his party's presidential nomination in 1948 and 1952. Many Republican foreign policy experts in particular worry that, coupled with Trump's strongman persona and what many see as his strong-arm instincts, the America First agenda would amount to a rejection of the United States' outsize role in protecting the liberal international order put in place after World War II.

Considering that members of the media and their political rivals often used the term "isolationist" to refer to both Ron Paul and his son, Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.), Trump could almost take Kitfield's use of the term to describe his foreign policy as a compliment.

As for rejecting "the United States' outsize role in protecting the liberal international order put in place



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after World War II,” a look at our dismal foreign policy record over the past 70 years indicates that that role is not only “outsized” but also severely misguided, and *should* be rejected.

That foreign policy steered the United States into wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Syria. The number of U.S. combat deaths that have resulted from that policy exceeds 100,000 and the cumulative cost is in excess of two trillion dollars!

We might also add that what Kitfield calls the “liberal international order” could just as accurately be described as the “*neoconservative* international order.”

Noninterventionists can only hope that Trump is serious about what he says about foreign policy and that his commitment to “America First” is genuine.

After all, candidates for political office have been known to break their campaign promises.

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