

The Anxious Era

[THANK YOU'S AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS]

I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to come here and speak. I think the last time I gave formal remarks about foreign policy in Princeton I was a freshman in high school here for a model UN. I was tasked with representing Djibouti on the Security Council. This was around 1996. America was the lone superpower at the height of our power.

It is interesting speaking to you here as we have Artemis coming back from a lap around the moon, since I went to college thinking I would try to be an astronaut. But then in my sophomore year of college, September 11th happened. I honestly don't think I had ever heard the name Afghanistan before that day, but by 6pm, I decided to dedicate my life to doing whatever I could to keep our country safe from future attacks. I studied in International Relations, joined the State Department as a career officer, and shipped off as a civilian to Afghanistan.

Now a generation later, we face a new moment of consequence. This moment where, unlike my model UN days, the global order is shifting around us - to one that is more multipolar, where autocrats are on the rise, where the pace of technological innovation will have unknown benefits and consequences, where the terrain of geopolitical battle is expanding, and where American global leadership is in question. This moment that our government has not been preparing for - and that the current administration is only making worse with its actions.

Two separate but connected sets of conversations really brought this home for me.

Two months ago, I attended the Munich Security Conference. It was my 3rd time going, but this year was different. What I heard there should worry us all because it was there where I saw the first real glimpses of a Post-America World. One where actors are working around us to shape a changing world, rather than with us.

One European partner said “*We can’t wait for you anymore.*”

In the eyes of the world, we are no longer the indispensable nation, we have instead become the undependable nation.

One leader I talked to at Munich said that in their government’s deliberations, they are now talking about America as a security threat to Europe.

Multiple countries were actively talking about how to “DE-RISK” from the United States, a term we previously used when discussing ways to be less dependent on competitors and adversaries like China and Russia who are gleeful watching our self sabotage.

The second conversation was at a town hall I held in Asbury Park after returning from what was essentially a global town hall in Munich. In this very different venue with a different audience, I heard similar anxieties over America’s future. While world leaders are asking if America can be trusted, Americans are asking if their government can be trusted serve them and their families.

One woman at the town hall shared with me her anxiety that we won't have free and fair elections as we see the push for the SAVE ACT. Another person said that there is no way they can afford to buy or even rent a home comfortably anymore.

Another woman told me she lives in a constant state of feeling overwhelmed.

I told her, I feel it too. The anxiety Americans feel is a symptom of a country that senses its own fragility.

60 percent of Americans can't handle a \$1000 emergency. 40 percent can't handle a \$400 emergency. The average age of a first time home buyer is 40 years of age now.

Driving this anxiety is a deeper fear: that we are on a collision course that can't be corrected. That some of the damage being done is irreversible.

I am here today to be honest with you about the state of our world and America's position in it from my experience in both national security and Congress. We are living through a fundamental shift

in global politics, that much is undeniable. The world is adapting for a post-America global era. They are skating to where they think the puck is going.

Americans across the country and the political spectrum are saying that the current state of the world isn't working for them. That they do not want us to continue the interventionist foreign policy of the past, but want their leaders to ensure security, stability, and access to the quality of life they deserve.

But I did not come here today simply to sound the alarm. It's not enough to say that "Might Makes Right" is the wrong approach. We know that approach would result in a highly unpredictable and uncertain world, one of ever changing dynamics based on the whims of fickle leaders, and one marked by spheres of influence. One where **America First means America Alone which means America Expensive.**

Instead, I came here because I believe there is a way we can change course.

I believe we now are at a moment where a future president will not be able to stand at the Capitol at their inauguration and utter the words "America is Back."

No one would believe those words, both here and abroad.

We need to chart a way forward grounded in reality. The window to act is narrowing, and the cost of complacency has never been higher. So we have to act.

The Resilience Response

If we will live in a time of crisis and global competitiveness where our power and credibility is waning, then we need to change what WE are doing. We need to adapt to meet this moment

I believe the word we need to guide us for the next decade of this new era must be RESILIENCE.

IF we are no longer the indispensable nation, and if we rightly reject being seen as the undependable nation, then we should strive to become the resilient nation.

We should pursue a national project of resilience to assess vulnerabilities, anticipate and mitigate disruptions and security concerns, and set the stage for a new era of opportunity.

Like an older skyscraper during an earthquake, we find ourselves today without the shock absorbers needed. We are tall and impressive, but our foundations of our nation — social, economic, and political — are rigid and inflexible to tremors. We lack the cross-bracing reinforcement and the dampers.

It's time we correct these structural flaws and build a way forward that leans into our strengths.

Here are seven key PRINCIPLES to design resilience-based architecture for our country:

FIRST: We need to recognize that economic security is national security. We should protect the economic security of American families with the

same intensity as we do our nation's physical security.

The American people saw money going to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, seemingly without end, and then were told there was no money for healthcare, or childcare, or student loans, or rebuilding our roads and public transit, or elder care. And now, they are seeing the same thing happen again with this senseless war with Iran and they see that this divestment in our lives isn't written in stone, it is a political choice.

Americans don't just feel insecure when they look at global threats, they feel insecure when they look at their families and can't assure them that things will be okay. I feel insecure when I don't know how I can keep paying my father's exorbitant costs as he was just diagnosed with Alzheimer's. These insecurities directly affect the resolve of the American people when it comes to wars, trade policies, and other significant considerations.

SECOND — Resource and energy security is national security. As we assess our vulnerabilities, we have seen some enormous strategic gaps that could be easily disrupted and cause significant cost and consequence.

As a national resilience goal, we should minimize dependence on any non-trusted nation or actor for priority resources including critical minerals, medical/pharmaceuticals, and energy, and produce enough to meet the soaring demand trajectory of the future while building climate resilience.

While this feels distant from the average family, your ability to buy a new phone, or car, or basically anything else comes down to our ability to access these minerals. Another country putting a stranglehold on supply would kill American jobs and put our economy in incredible danger.

I call on Congress to take on this issue with the same urgent bipartisan focus and drive as we did for the Chips and Science act and the bipartisan infrastructure law, and provide a comprehensive framework for securing our supply chains, building refining and processing capabilities, and increasing our energy production through investments at home and cooperation with trusted allies and partners.

THIRD Principle — Resilience isn't self-reliance.

These concerns about our supply chains shows that we can't do this all alone. There is no way we can mine, refine, or recycle everything we need on our own.

We need to update our alliances and partnerships for the era ahead, building a resilience-focused multilateralism and minilateralism that can help us reduce our vulnerabilities. In general, resilience-focused diplomacy will also mean updating and adapting our alliances to be more flexible and durable, organized around not just our defense relationships or geography but around the economic and technological relationships that will power the future global economy.

It will also mean updating our own institutions of diplomacy and development to better meet the needs of the 21st century. And America can shape the global institutions of the future without shouldering their full burdens.

To accomplish this we must break down the artificial barrier between foreign policy and domestic policy.

When I worked at the State Department, Pentagon, White House National Security Council, we were taught that there is a firewall with the domestic policy side. There is essentially no significant interaction, no strategic planning cutting across our government.

The reality is our foreign policy cannot deliver for the American people, or position us to shape the world around us, if it is disconnected from what we are doing at home. We cannot operate in a space where only the President and a handful of top advisors occupy the venn diagram overlap between domestic and foreign policy.

We will need to reorient the structure and participation in the National Security Council to better blend foreign and domestic policy coordination and sharing, and we need to embed this sharing within the structures of Departments and Agencies. But it's much more. It's a recognition of the wide impacts of decisions. Cuts at HHS and NIH funding or Department of Education changes affect our foreign relations. Decimating our renewable energy production is increasing costs while devastating our ability to lead on climate resilience. The tariffs have completely scrambled domestic business and manufacturing. That Chips and Science and Infrastructure affects our global relations and priorities.

FOURTH — As we build new infrastructure for diplomacy, resilience demands that we modernize our defense capabilities and posture. War is becoming cheaper to sustain, easier to wage, and closer to home. I was born in an era of weapons of mass destruction, but now we live in an era of weapons of mass production – drones, cyber attacks, IEDs all dominate the modern battlefield. They've flattened traditional advantages that advanced modern militaries have and expanded the domains of conflict.

Our legacy defense sector must rapidly adapt to the future of warfare driven by technological advancements. Innovation will put these tools in the hands of more actors, including our adversaries. Establishing a new deterrence is vital, especially as conflict grows more pervasive.

FIFTH — Resilience requires pragmatism.

Pragmatism means recognizing that in an increasingly multipolar world we cannot and will not be able to lead globally in the same way we have in the past, helping us avoid overextension and better focus on delivering results for the American people.

For instance when it comes to the defense efforts I just raised, we need to commit ourselves to employing our military only in vitally important circumstances core to our national interests. The current misguided war in Iran only underscores the unintended and costly consequences of pursuing a war of choice - not only in the short-term, but potentially major strategic consequences in the long term that will harm our ability to maintain deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

Pragmatism will facilitate building new models of leadership where we work in greater partnership with those who are aligned with our interests in order to shape the global environment to our advantage.

SIXTH —We need to restore Americans' faith in government and root out corruption. We cannot lead globally if our foundations are not strong at home.

In meetings at Munich, it was readily apparent that no one doubted the military capabilities of America, but everyone, allies and adversaries alike, had deep doubts about our ability to make durable political decisions with a strategy to execute. Our weakness isn't hard power. They question our resolve. In Asbury Park, the town hall hit home how so much of the anxiety right now that people carry is about the

tailspin of our politics and governance. Without real substantive reforms, there won't be trust that the chaos we see now won't rear its head again.

SEVENTH: THE SEVENTH AND FINAL PRINCIPLE OF RESILIENCE IS THAT RESILIENCE ISN'T AN END IN ITSELF. IT IS AN ENABLING STATE TO BUILD SOMETHING EVEN GREATER.

Architects and builders design resilient buildings to secure the work going on inside and protect the people. The goal isn't to persist in this current era and endure the chaos we see indefinitely, but instead to break the crisis loop and be intentional in transitioning towards a new era that will replace the current one – one that is favorable for the American people's security and prosperity.

One where we are positioning the United States to *shape the emerging global order* that will replace the current one – one that will help Americans live with more security and less anxiety.

I call this the Opportunity Era.

That era that we should strive for should be one where America, after this purposeful project of resilience, is in a much stronger position to deliver

the kinds of results for the American people that the current Anxious Era is actively denying.

Few factors will shape opportunity more than innovation. America must lead in innovation in the technologies that will power the future, and ensure that this positions all Americans, not just the few, for prosperity and global competitiveness.

The competitiveness of the future depends on more than developing next generation technologies, hardware and software - it means managing the disruptive effects of AI and addressing the growing power of a small number of AI companies while harnessing its opportunities.

The Opportunity Era also demands that we develop, grow, and gain talent.

This past year, more people left the US than moved to it, the first time since the Great Depression. We are hemorrhaging scientists, researchers, and skilled labor. If my parents were looking to immigrate to America now to study as they did 50 years ago, I don't think they would be able to get in given all the obstacles.

Right now, people from around the world who aspire to achieve the American Dream are being told you're

not welcome – and the message is being received. We need a new message: America is going to lead the innovation of the future, but we can't do it alone and need your help.

As we move beyond Trump, we need to set forward new national goals to draw in the talent and to fund the research that will propel innovation. This doesn't mean turning back the clock. Already we weren't making the investments into biotech, quantum, photonics, and other critical sectors. We can still stop the drain of talent, but we don't have much time to lose.

Living in the Opportunity Era

The next 5 years will shape the next 5 decades. It's important to acknowledge that this vision – where people's lives are driven by opportunity, not anxiety – requires a reset and rethinking of our relationship with our government, our government's relationship with the world, and our relationship with the idea of security.

You can't have opportunity with anxiety, and there is nothing that fuels anxiety more than insecurity.

To protect opportunity, we must not just be resilient to these changes, we must increase our own agility. Opportunity isn't secured by recklessly committing American forces to conflicts around the world, it's secured by having a clear understanding of what it means to ensure opportunities for the American people. It requires us to build a strategy to make sure we are on the cutting edge of the technologies to defend opportunity, working with allies and partners, and understand that production, not just destruction, will be key to keeping our future safe.

A Commitment to Move Forward

There is work to be done. It won't be easy. But I believe it is necessary.

I was a college student during the last transition in global eras. Like many of you, I asked myself what role I could play when it felt like what was happening were collisions of global tectonic plates.

But what I learned is that it's in these times of crisis, in the fluid moments of emerging global eras, that individuals, especially younger individuals who are willing and able to work hard and bring new ideas, can have enormous impact and can rapidly rise in responsibility.

Do not let the gravity and enormity of what we face make you think you cannot shape what comes next. I often say that I believe the opposite of democracy is apathy. And there would be nothing worse in this moment for us to be paralyzed by helplessness. America is on the wrong path right now, but I wouldn't be here right now speaking to you if I didn't think it could change.

You all will be the leaders of this country when my kids grow up. So don't screw it up....ok? I'm counting on you. But seriously, as long as I'm your Senator, I'll do everything I humanly can to build this resilient America that can work for all of us. I hope you'll join me.

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