

# Remarks by Senator Andy Kim on his vision for the future of American foreign policy

Princeton University School of Public and International Affairs

Princeton, NJ

April 7, 2026 | 12:20 P.M. EST

Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks so much for having me, Dean. Thank you so much for the kind introduction. This is my first time here in the building. So, I'm grateful to have the chance. And I heard that this is senior thesis day. So, do we have any seniors here in the room? Yeah, well. Thank you. Congrats. I heard you had to drop it off 20 minutes ago, so hopefully you, hopefully you got it in on time and, and if you are listening to me, instead of partying it up, I respect you even more.

This speech is something that I have been looking towards doing for quite some time. Even before I became a Senator. What I was trying to do here is to not necessarily talk through the individual crises that we face right now, but try to take a step back and try to look at this moment in America, a moment where I think many of us have deep concerns about where our country is heading and the types of things that are happening. But I wanted to lay out something that wasn't just about what we are concerned about, what we are opposed to, but laying out then what is it that we are trying to push forward on? What is the strategy going forward that can help us and in particular, I wanted to speak to the students here to talk through what I think you all need to be thinking about as you leave these walls at some point soon and work in this project, hopefully with me, to try to address the challenges that we face. To give you a sense of not just the battles of today and tomorrow, but the battles that we're going to continue to be fighting two, three, four or five years and further down the road.

That being said, I did want to at least make one statement of just saying that we absolutely cannot tolerate language coming out of this president about attacking civilizations, of threatening tens of millions of people, about our country now being engaged in an illegal and unconstitutional war, one that we cannot be standing for. And as much as I love being here and speaking to you and being able to do this speech right now, I believe that Congress should be in session, that we should be reconvening right now. And doing what the Constitution tells us to do, which is actually be able to guide our country forward, to have a check against a president that sees no constraints upon his power, and to be able to actually push forward, to lift up the voice of the American people. So that is just something I wanted to say at the outset.

Before we dive into the deeper speech here, I actually want to say the last time I gave formal remarks about foreign policy in Princeton, I was a freshman in high school. I was here for a model UN. I was tasked with representing Djibouti on the Security Council. That was around 1996 or so. America was a lone superpower at the height of our power globally.

And it's interesting speaking to you here, as we have the Artemis II coming back from a lap around the moon, something that I hope you all drew just immense inspiration from, because I actually went

to college thinking that I was hopefully going to be an astronaut. That didn't happen. But that's in part because when I was a sophomore in college, September 11th happened. And I think for so many of us, thinking through that day, it was such a traumatic experience, I honestly can say I don't think I even had heard the word of the country, Afghanistan, before that day. But by 6 p.m. on September 11th, I told myself that I was going to now dedicate my life to trying to secure our country, to stop these types of attacks from happening, to try to give us the type of stability that is needed. And that is a path that started at dinner time on September 11th that led me into a career in international relations, led me to join the State Department as a career officer, and even included me being out in Afghanistan on the 10th anniversary of September 11th, and then being at Ground Zero as a member of Congress on the 20th anniversary of September 11th.

Now we are a generation later and we face a new moment of consequence as important, if not even more consequential than what we experienced a generation ago. And 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, but also consequences, and 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.

Now, two separate but connected sets of conversations really brought this home for me in the last few months.

Two months ago, I attended the Munich Security Conference. It was my third time going, but this year was different. What I heard there should worry all of us, because it was there that I saw the first real glimpses of a post-America world, one where actors are working around us to shape the changing world rather than with us. One European partner said, quote, 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 deliberations, they are now talking about America as a security threat to Europe. Multiple countries were actively there at Munich, talking about how to de-risk from the United States, a term that we previously coined when discussing ways to be less dependent upon our competitors and adversaries like China and Russia, who are gleefully watching our own self-sabotage before their very eyes.

The second conversation I had was at a town hall 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 to 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 America Act. Another person said that there is no way that they can afford to buy a home or even rent a home comfortably in this state anymore. Another woman told me that she lives in a constant state of feeling overwhelmed, and I told her I feel it too.

The anxiety Americans feel is a symptom of a country that senses its own fragility. 60% of Americans cannot handle a \$1,000 emergency, 40% can't handle a \$400 emergency, and the average age for a

first-time homebuyer is now 40 years of age. Driving this anxiety is a deeper fear that we are on a collision course that cannot be corrected, and that some of the damage being done right now is irreversible.

I am here today, to be honest with you, about the state of our world and America's position within it, from my experience, both in national security and in Congress. We are living through a fundamental shift in global politics. That much is undeniable. The world is adapting to a post-America global era, and they are skating to where they think the puck is going. Americans across our 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 this interventionist foreign policy of the past, but want their leaders to ensure security, stability and access to quality of life that they deserve.

But I did not come here today simply to sound an 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 that ever changing dynamics based on the whims of fickle leaders and one marked by spheres of influence. One where we see America first actually... means America alone, which actually means America is expensive. And instead, we came here because I believe that there is a way for us to change course. I believe we are now at a moment where a future American president cannot stand at the Capitol on Inauguration Day and utter the words, America is back. No one would believe us, whether here at home or abroad. We need to chart a way forward that is grounded in reality.

A window to act is narrowing, and the cost of complacency has never been higher. So, we have to act. Now, if we 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 we find ourselves in, is resilience.

If we are no longer the indispensable nation, and we rightly reject being seen as an undependable nation, then I think we should strive to be the resilient nation. We should pursue a national project of resilience, to assess our vulnerabilities, to 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 foundation is weak and rigid and inflexible to the tremors. We lack the cross bracing; reinforcements and the dampers is time that we correct these structural flaws and build a way forward that leans into our strengths. Here are seven principles to design a resilient 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 our money go into the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, seemingly without end, and then we're told that there's no money for health care or childcare or education and student loans or rebuilding our roads or public transit or elder care. And now they are seeing the same thing happen again with this senseless war in Iran. And they see the divestments in our lives isn't written in stone. It is a political choice. Americans don't just feel insecure when they look at these global threats. They feel insecure when they look at their families and can assure them that things will be okay. I feel insecure when I know that I can't keep paying for my father's exorbitant costs, as he's been diagnosed

with Alzheimer's. These insecurities affect us directly and affect the resolve of the American people. When it comes to foreign wars and 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 easily disrupt and cause significant cost and consequence. As a national resilience goal, we should minimize dependence on any non-trusted nations or actors for priority resources, including critical minerals, medical and pharmaceuticals, energy and produce not just enough for right now, but to meet the soaring demand and trajectory into the future, while we also balance with building climate resilience. While this feels distant for the average family, your ability to buy a phone, a car or basically anything comes down to our ability to access minerals, to be able to access energy. Another country putting a stranglehold on the supply could very well kill jobs and put our economy in incredible danger. And I call on Congress to use the same level of urgency that we see that often is geared towards national security, geared towards counterterrorism, to drive towards what it is that we need to do to secure our supply chain, to build refining and processing capabilities and increase our energy production through investments at home and with our allies and our partners.

And that hits out a third principle, which – resilience is not self-reliance. This is not just about doing it ourselves. There are concerns about our supply chain that show we can't do this all alone. There is no way we can mine or refine or recycle everything that we need on our own. We need to update our alliances and partnerships for this new era, build a resilience-focused multilateralism and a unilateralism that can help us reduce our vulnerabilities. In general, this resilience focused diplomacy will also mean updating and adapting our alliances to be more flexible and durable. To organize them not just around defense relationships or geography, but around the economic and technological relationships that will power our future global economy. It will also mean updating our own institutions of diplomacy and development to better meet the needs of the 21st century. An America that can shape the global institutions of the future without shouldering their full burdens alone. To accomplish this, we need to break down the artificial barrier between foreign policy and domestic policy. When I work at the State Department or at the Pentagon or the White House National Security Council, we were taught that there is a firewall that separates foreign policy with domestic policy. This has essentially created no significant attractions or strategic planning cutting across the entirety of our government.

Now, the reality of 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 here at home. We cannot operate in a space where only the president and a handful of top advisers occupy the overlap of a Venn diagram between domestic and foreign policy. We need to reorient the structure and participation of the National Security Council to better blend foreign and domestic policy coordination and share. And we need to embed this sharing within the structures of our departments and agencies.

But it's more than that. We have to recognize the wide impacts of our decisions. That we see that cuts at Health and Human Services and the National Institutes of Health, the funding cuts at Department of Education — this changes and affects our foreign policy. It changes in and affects who wants to

come to the United States or not. That we see decimating our renewable energy production here domestically has increasing costs, not just on our own costs that we bear, but on our ability to leave climate resilience global. That the tariffs have completely scrambled domestic businesses and manufacturing, but overall also global supply chains and our partnerships abroad. That the Chips and Science Act and Infrastructure law affect our global relations and priorities as much as they do to rebuild our roads and our public transit.

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 at top of mind, but now we live in an era of weapons of mass production, drones and cyber-attacks, IEDs all dominating the modern battlefield. They flatten traditional advantages that advanced modern militaries have expanded the domain 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 and more actors, including our adversaries, including non-state actors. And establishing a new deterrence is vital, especially as conflict grows more pervasive.

Fifth, resilience does require pragmatism. Pragmatism means recognizing that in an increasingly multipolar world, we cannot and will not be able to lead globally in the same way that we have in the past, helping us avoid overextension and better focusing on delivering results for the American people. For instance, I just talked about our defense efforts, but we need to make sure we're committing 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 could very well harm our ability to maintain deterrence elsewhere in the world, including 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.

Six — we need to restore American faith in our government to root out the corruption, to restore that sense of trust. We cannot lead globally if our foundations are not strong at home in meetings after meetings in 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 many people have that anxiety right now — I'm sure many in this room. How we carry this weight about the tailspin of our politics and our governance without real, substantive reforms, there won't be the trust that the chaos we see right now won't rear its head again.

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 that design resilient buildings. They do that to secure the work going on inside and to protect the people inside. The goal isn't to somehow just persist and endure in this current era and endure the chaos that we see indefinitely, but to instead

to break this crisis loop that we experience and be intentional in transitioning towards a new era, one that will replace this current one. One that is favorable for American people, their security, their prosperity. One where we are positioned in the United States to shape the emerging global order that will replace the current one. One that will help Americans live their lives with security and less anxiety.

I call this the opportunity era, the era that we should strive for right now, after this purposeful project of resilience and to be able to put America in a stronger position to deliver the kinds of results for the American people that currently is being denied to them.

Few factors will shape opportunity more than innovation. Americans must lead in the innovation and the technology 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 just next generation technologies and hardware, and software means managing the disruptive effects of AI and addressing the growing power of small companies, small numbers of AI companies, while harnessing their opportunities. The opportunity area also demands that we grow and build and develop talent.

This past year, more Americans left the United States than moved into it. That is the first time since the Great Depression — we are hemorrhaging scientists, researchers, skilled labor. If my parents, who immigrated here 50 years ago to study in science and in medicine, tried right now, I don't think they will be able to get in, given the obstacles. Right now, people around the world who aspire to achieve the American Dream are being told you're not welcome. And that message is being received by them, and they're going elsewhere. We need a new message that America is going to lead in the innovation of the future - but we can't do it alone, and we need your help. And as we move beyond Trump, we need to set forward a new national goal to draw in talent, as well as grow that talent here at home that can propel our innovation forward.

Now, this doesn't mean turning back the clock. We already weren't making the investments necessary to be able to lead in key industries like biotech, quantum, photonics, and other critical sectors. And we can still stop this drain of talent, but we don't have much more time. The next five years will shape the next five decades, and it's important to acknowledge that this vision, where people's lives are driven by opportunity, not anxiety — it 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 reliant and 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 technology. Working with our allies and partners and understand that production, not just destruction, will be key to keeping our future safe.

There is work to be done, and it won't be easy, but I believe it's necessary. I was a college student during the last transition of global eras, and like many of you in this room, I asked myself at the time

what role could I play? And it sounds impossible, and it felt small, when I was looking at the collisions of these global tectonic plates.

But to the students here, I say what I learned at that time and in the years since, is that it's in these moments of crisis, in these fluid moments of emerging global errors 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 the enormity of what we face make you think you cannot shape what comes next. I often say that I believe that the opposite of democracy is apathy, and there is nothing worse in this moment right now than for us to be paralyzed by a sense of helplessness. America is on the wrong path right now, but I would not be here with you right now, speaking to you, if I didn't believe it could change.

You students here, you are going to be the leaders of the country where my kids grow up. So, don't screw it up, okay? I'm counting on you. But seriously, as long as I am your Senator and as long as I have the opportunity to serve this country, I'll do everything I humanly can to build this resilient America that can work for all of us. And I hope you'll join me. Thank you everyone.