

Submitted Statement of Secretary Madeleine K. Albright
“The Trump Administration’s Foreign Policy: A Mid-Term Assessment”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Wednesday, February 27, 2019

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, members of the committee: good morning to you all.

I am pleased to be here and appreciate the chance to offer my perspective on the many challenging issues before this committee.

Let’s begin with some context.

We live in a world being reshaped – for better and for worse – by two major inter-related trends.

The first is globalization, which has brought people closer together than ever before and enabled us to travel, trade and share ideas at an unprecedented rate.

But for all its benefits, globalization is also threatening and faceless. Many people worry that they will lose their livelihoods to foreign competition, and their separate identities in some vast, faceless, multicultural sea. And while I believe patriotism is a virtue, I am very concerned about the rise of a kind of nationalism that equates an affinity for “us” with a hatred of “them.”

The second trend is the constant march of technology, which has helped the world to become more efficient and broadened access to knowledge, food, medicine, and markets. Whenever I am in Africa, I am amazed at the difference cell phones have made to farmers, entrepreneurs, and health care professionals – especially women.

But technology, too, has a downside. A network that can disseminate truth can spread lies just as rapidly. And the rise of social media has enabled people everywhere to share their grievances both instantly and globally.

We thought technology would help democracy by amplifying people’s voices, but it has also made governing more difficult and given demagogues another tool to build emotional bonfires out of the kindling of lies, prejudice and paranoia.

These megatrends, for better and worse, are making the world more turbulent and generating disorder in practically every region. They were in evidence long before the advent of the Trump Administration and, beginning in 2017, would have confronted any new commander-in-chief with vexing foreign policy challenges.

But the question before the committee today is where does America stand in 2019? And more specifically, what has President Trump’s foreign policy meant for the security and prosperity of the United States?

As many of you know, I am a professor at Georgetown, and if I were grading Mr. Trump, I would begin charitably and mark many of his efforts as incomplete.

For example, he kept his promise to negotiate a revised trade deal with Canada and Mexico, although he did create a lot of animosity with our closest neighbors.

His administration's heavy-handed approach to China could produce gains, with signs of progress in recent days.

His engagement with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un has yielded scant dividends to date, but talking is better than fighting. I hope that the summit now underway in Vietnam will, unlike the earlier one in Singapore, generate real and tangible progress towards the denuclearization of North Korea.

Afghanistan is another area where, to its credit, the administration is now pursuing a diplomatic strategy. But it is far too soon to tell whether we can responsibly end the conflict with a political settlement that would benefit the Afghan people and therefore America's interests.

In the Middle East, the administration has been promising for two years to unveil an innovative plan for peace; we cannot judge what we can't yet see.

Finally, in Venezuela, the administration is right to press for democratic change. As we can all see, the situation there is tense and complicated. The United States should not do anything that inadvertently strengthens Maduro's hand. We should continue to work closely with colleagues in the region, while upholding the principle that the Venezuelan people alone have the right to determine their future.

That is the good news. In other areas, the administration's record is marked by confusion, inconsistency, a lack of diplomacy, and, in some cases, a complete abdication of responsibility.

On Iran's nuclear program, climate change, trans-Pacific trade, and the INF treaty, this administration has chosen to renounce the efforts of prior administrations, both Republican and Democratic. I believe each of those decisions was a mistake.

Much of the Middle East is a tinderbox, and even the most seasoned foreign policy experts have trouble keeping track of who is on whose side as powers such as Russia, Turkey, Iran and the Gulf States compete for influence.

On Syria we appear to be pursuing several policies simultaneously, confusing our allies, delighting our adversaries, and putting at risk the significant gains made since 2014 in the fight against ISIS.

In Saudi Arabia, the president and secretary of state have aligned themselves with a leader thought by our own intelligence agencies to have authorized the murder of a journalist.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, having just been with many of you at the Munich Security Conference, I can attest to my sadness at the state of relations between the United States under this administration and our allies in Europe.

I do not, by any means, absolve Europe of all blame for the disagreements and misunderstandings that exist. We are right to ask more of them, especially in the form of contributions to our common defense. I do think, however, that we can make our points more productively without bullying, name-calling, and threats.

If we are not friends with our friends, to whom will we turn for help?

In that context, even many in the administration are in the dark about the president's conversations with Vladimir Putin. Meanwhile, Russia continues to play a spoiler role in the Middle East while working to undermine democracies around the world.

I have more general concerns. The course I teach is about the foreign policy decision-making process. My students look at how information has been gathered, options weighed, and actions decided on at key points in American history.

Today, I am not sure we have a foreign policy decision-making process.

Vacancies persist across the spectrum of national security agencies. We still have no ambassadors in, among other very important countries, Egypt, Jordan, Mexico, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey.

I recently attended a UN conference on migration; among those present were high-level representatives from China and Russia. The chair set aside for the United States was empty.

Worldwide, there are more refugees huddled in camps than there have been since the Nazi surrender almost three-quarters of a century ago, yet the United States is less welcoming to the international homeless than at any point in modern memory.

Throughout the lifetime of my generation, people around the world have been able to look to the United States as the single most powerful leader on behalf of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. We have never been perfect, but we have always been present; and we have always taken our responsibilities seriously because we had seen first-hand the cost of abdication: Holocaust and global war.

Today, the enemies of freedom smell something in the air that gives them hope, the odor of America's absence, and the impression that our leader shares their disdain for democracy.

All in all, the situation is both sad and dangerous.

The administration still has time to awaken, but my greater hope is with you – the men and women of this new Congress.

Again, as I tell my students, many of the tools we have available to advance our interests in the world – including sanctions, trade agreements, and the use of military force – depend on Congress to be activated.

Congress also plays an essential role by providing resources for defense, diplomacy, development and democracy programs which are crucial to the success of our foreign policy.

I have met with enough members of congress from both parties to know that you did not come to Washington to preside over an abdication; you want America to lead.

As you know, the powers of the legislative branch are set out in Article I of the Constitution. Well, 2019 is Article I time. You can – you must – help put us on the right path.

So I urge you to use your powers of oversight and your influence with the public to ask the right questions and to hold the executive branch accountable. I commend this committee and Chairman Engel for their leadership in working to end the U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen, as well as the bipartisan legislation which recently passed reaffirming U.S. support for NATO.

I ask you to continue to protect essential funding for diplomacy, development and democracy in the face of this administration's efforts to defund the State Department. As Chairman of the National Democratic Institute, I have seen the benefits of these programs first-hand and can tell you that they are some of the most cost-effective ways of advancing our interests around the world.

I ask you to reassure our allies in Europe that America will continue to stand with them and for the democratic values that are at the heart of the transatlantic partnership. Engage with foreign counterparts wherever possible, including through official foreign travel delegations.

Finally, never forget that, when we work together across party lines, we set an example for other democracies, both established and emerging. At the beginning of the year I had the pleasure of traveling down to Williamsburg for the CRS orientation, which new members of both parties attended without wearing their party label on name badges. There is no masking over some of our differences, but I do believe in the importance of bipartisanship and the powerful signal that such cooperation can send to the world.

That is why I have recently invested time and effort in two initiatives that may be of interest to this committee.

The first, a Declaration of Principles for Freedom, Security, and Prosperity, was launched at the Munich Security Conference with the goal of rallying the democratic world on behalf of our common values. More than seventy years have elapsed since the Atlantic Charter was issued and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. Perhaps we started taking some of those principles for granted. So the time is right to renew our vows and to engage a new generation in freedom's cause.

The second initiative is the U.S. Institute of Peace's Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States, which was co-chaired by Governor Kean and Former Congressman Lee

Hamilton. Yesterday we launched a report which called on the United States to adopt a long-term strategy of prevention – addressing the underlying conditions that fuel extremism in the first place by better coordinating U.S. efforts and pooling international resources to support partners in fragile states.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, members of the committee: we meet at a moment of great uncertainty and global turbulence. We are in a new era, and we need to work together to build a consensus on what America's position should be in the world. For my part, I believe America must remain the indispensable nation. But there is nothing about the word indispensable that means alone.

We can and must act in partnership with like-minded countries to advance our common interests and to build a world that is more prosperous, secure, and free. And your continued leadership is essential if we are to achieve that goal.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

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