About the Camden Conference

Every year since 1987 the Camden Conference has provided interested individuals from Midcoast Maine and beyond an opportunity to learn first-hand from, and engage directly with, renowned experts on issues of global importance. Each year, a topic is selected and speakers from government, academia, international organizations, the media and business are invited to participate in a three-day conference in Camden in February. The Conference is simultaneously streamed to audiences in Belfast, Portland, and Rockland. Each speaker addresses a facet of the year’s topic, answers questions from the audience in all three locations, and participates in an exchange of ideas throughout the weekend. All the talks are subsequently made available on our website, www.camdenconference.org.

Previous Camden Conference programs have examined Refugees and Global Migration, Religion as a Force in World Affairs, and The Global Politics of Food and Water. The Conference has also focused on geopolitical areas, including the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Russia, and Africa. The February 2019 Camden Conference will consider China’s expanding role in today’s world.

Exciting as the weekend is, the Camden Conference has over the years become a much bigger presence in the educational and intellectual life of our region. Dozens of events related to the annual Conference theme or promoting informed discourse on world issues are held in communities across Maine. These Community Events include lectures, symposia, and senior-college courses; group discussions of selected articles and film clips; and longer films, art exhibits, and other cultural programs. All are open to the public, and most are free of charge. They are led by scholars and other well-informed area residents.

The Camden Conference works to enhance the teaching of global affairs in Maine universities, colleges, and high schools by subsidizing and encouraging student attendance at the February Conference—often in the context of courses directly related to the Conference theme—and by staging student-oriented and student-led events around the Conference.

The Camden Conference is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. The board of directors includes residents of several Midcoast towns, all of whom volunteer their time, talent, and energy to organize the Conference and related programs. Financial support for the Camden Conference comes from attendance fees; memberships; individual gifts; and grants from institutions, foundations, and corporations.
The 2018 Camden Conference on New World Disorder and America's Future explored shifts in global power and their ramifications for major players, particularly China, the U.S., and the nations of Europe, in pursuing their national interests. Our nine speakers addressed the impact of globalization, the rise of nationalism, transformations in global economies, and the management of a range of future threats, such as climate change, population growth, and cyber insecurity.

More than 1100 were in the Camden Opera House and three satellite, live-stream locations in Belfast, Rockland, and Portland. Others in the audience watched the 2018 Camden Conference at home, through pay-per-view. More than 200 of our attendees were high school and college students.

This issue of Highlights distills the messages of our speakers. It seeks to convey the main points of each speaker’s presentation. To view the 2018 Conference in its entirety, go to the Camden Conference website at www.camdenconference.org.

The Best of Times or the Worst of Times?
Stephen Walt

Nationalism, Populism in the U.S. and Their Impact on American Foreign Policy
Gerald Seib

Open Versus Closed Europe? The New Cultural Divide within the European Union
Matthew Goodwin

Politics, Nationalism and Their Impact on U.S.-China Relations and China’s Role in World Affairs
Evan S. Medeiros

Sovereignty, Solidarity, and New Rules for a Changing Global Economy
Thea Mei Lee

The Importance of Multilateral Frameworks and Mechanisms for Addressing Threats against the United States
Avril D. Haines

The “3 Geos” Reshaping our World
Cleo Paskal

Can Europe Hold the Fort?
Natalie Nougayrède

“This Too Shall Pass”
Chas Freeman
One of the challenges of a keynote speech is to set the parameters for the speakers who follow. Walt in his keynote address clearly set the playing field by drawing out lines of rational analysis from what is described as a chaotic world situation.

Walt set the goal posts for the field of discourse by drawing on Dickens—asking if these are “the best of times or the worst of times.” He then posited one of the main themes for the conference, “a widespread sense that the world order that we have known for decades is crumbling before our eyes.” He asked whether this worldview of crumbling order was warranted and what might explain it. He told the audience what the main points of his presentation were going to be: that the United States is responsible in large part, but not entirely, for the changing world order; that failures in foreign policy in part helped bring Donald Trump to the presidency, and, finally, that the Trump administration was making a bad situation worse.

Before going to the heart of his presentation, Walt poked around each of his goal posts, investigating whether the glass is half full (the best of times) or half empty (the worst of times). He started with the half-full scenario by citing a recent New York Times interview with Bill Gates and Harvard academic Steven Pinker. (Here he raised a theme that Gerald Seib of the Wall Street Journal would discuss later in the conference: the current status of the “legacy press.”) Looking back over a longer period of history, he said, the human species is better off than at any other time: death rates are falling; infant mortality is down; genocide statistics, despite Rwanda, have fallen; starvation and malnutrition are declining; and there are more democracies in the world than at any time in history. Compared with the Middle Ages, for example, humanity today is living in the best of times.

If one focuses on the 25 years since the end of the Cold War, however, the picture is not so rosy. In 1993, the U.S. had arrived at a unipolar moment, “… the world was converging toward us, the wind was at our back, and our only problems were a few pesky dictators like Gaddafi or Milosevic, or Saddam Hussein, who hadn’t gotten the memo.” The U.S. was on good terms with Russia and China, democracy was spreading, Iran had zero nuclear centrifuges, the 1994 Agreement Framework appeared to cap North Korea’s nuclear program, NATO and the EU were expanding democracy and inventing the euro, and the Oslo Accords created genuine hope for a lasting peace in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, 25 years later, China has grown into a “peer competitor,” Russia owns the Crimea and infects eastern Ukraine, democracy is declining at home and abroad, the Oslo Accords have “flat-lined,” the rogue state of North Korea is nuclear armed, and the 2007–09 world financial collapse has had far-reaching effects at home and abroad and helped trigger populist resentment at the “one percent.” By 2016, Trump could declare U.S. foreign policy “a complete and total disaster.” So what went wrong?
Walt noted that all the major world problems were not of U.S. creation, but that our unsuccessful policy of heavily militarized regime change had contributed to or engendered the lion’s share of them. Meanwhile, the Trump administration, after naming the failure of U.S. foreign policy, exacerbated the situation, instead of setting a course to correct it, by poking its fingers deep into the eyes of trusted allies, withdrawing from fulcrum agreements such as the Paris climate accord, failing to recognize the threat to democracy by Russia, and gutting the State Department. For good measure, Trump accused China of currency manipulation “to steal U.S. jobs,” threatened to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal, and drove a stake into the flat-lined heart of the two-state Middle East solution by announcing the move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

Walt summarized the bad news: “We still have a failed grand strategy, but it is now being implemented by the least competent president in modern memory, a man whose White House was described by a senior Republican politician as a ‘snake pit,’ and whose turnover rate among senior staff is the highest in history.”

Describing himself as a realist, Walt then pulled his audience back from the lemming ledge of despair with a set of suggestions for what the U.S. can do instead of continuing a failed policy of regime change. He noted that the U.S. is still in a powerful world position with its strong economy, unparalleled military strength, and the natural geographic defense of two oceans. (Cleo Paskal’s presentation the next day would illuminate the already profound effects of geo-physical changes, including climate change, on land- and seascapes.) Walt also observed that most of our traditional allies remain strong and interested in cooperating with Washington. (But former Le Monde editor Natalie Nougayrède, now a columnist/foreign affairs commentator for The Guardian, would warn in her Saturday segment that personal relationships and personalities do matter.)

Walt pointed out that the U.S. has no rival hegemon in Europe, but that China poses precisely that threat in Asia. Here too he offered the countervailing course of forging coalitions with local powers through careful, perceptive diplomacy. Then he tapped a policy concept that has been underplayed of late by U.S. politicians who do not want to appear “soft or fuzzy-minded.”

“We would also do well to de-emphasize the role of military power in our foreign policy and put greater priority on peace,” Walt said. The U.S. has apparently forgotten the peace dividend that strengthens the home economy while building lasting solutions abroad, “... but from a hard-head, selfish, unsentimental realist perspective, peace is in our interest and our leaders should not hesitate to say so.”

Walt sees the best policy as one that resets a strong, clear democracy at home. “Spreading democracy via regime change doesn’t work, but creating a society others would want to emulate would be good for us at home and good for others too.”

Reported by Stephen Orsini

“Spreading democracy via regime change doesn’t work, but creating a society others would want to emulate would be good for us at home and good for others too.”

STEPHEN WALT is the Robert and Renee Belfer Professor of International Affairs at Harvard University. He previously taught at Princeton University and the University of Chicago and has been a Resident Associate of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace and a Guest Scholar at the Brookings Institution. Walt has also served as a consultant for the Institute of Defense Analyses, the Center for Naval Analyses, and the National Defense University. He currently serves on the editorial boards of Foreign Policy, Security Studies, International Relations, and Journal of Cold War Studies, and is co-editor of the Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Cornell University Press). He was elected as a Fellow in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in May 2005. Walt is the author of The Origins of Alliances (1987), which received the 1988 Edgar S. Furniss National Security Book Award. He is also the author of Revolution and War (1996), Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy (2005), and, with co-author J.J. Mearsheimer, The Israel Lobby (2007). He earned his bachelor’s degree in international relations at Stanford University and his M.A and Ph.D. in political science at the University of California, Berkeley.
Gerald Seib’s talk gave a clear view of the rise of populism and nationalism in the U.S., its impact in certain areas of American foreign policy, and its surprising lack of impact in other areas. Seib began with his conclusion, then provided what he sees as supporting information.

“I think the populism trend clearly affects international policy, and it somewhat affects other foreign policies,” he said. “But I actually think it does very little to determine national security policies and postures or to help us predict attitudes about American involvement and intervention around the world. And in fact, some of the [Wall Street Journal survey] results are the opposite of what people expected.”

Early in his presentation, Seib defined the meaning of populism. “People apply it to all sorts of movements and tendencies, but let’s go back to the basics. Populism isn’t really an ideology at all. It’s more an attitude. As somebody wrote in the American Interest magazine recently, ‘Populism is a means of doing politics, not an ideology.’

“Political scientists define populists as those who target a country’s elites in the name of ‘the people.’ Populists think that the interests of the people, broadly speaking, are no longer represented by the elites in their society. Therefore, they question the legitimacy of the institutions that make up liberal democracies.”

Despite his wealth and long experience using the system to his own advantage, Donald Trump is correctly defined as a populist, as is Bernie Sanders, said Seib. “If the textbook definition of a populist is someone who mistrusts the prevailing institutions and the elites who run them, then definitely that’s a feeling on the rise in the U.S. as well as Europe,” he said.

What triggered the recent rise in populism? Seib believes it is a consequence of the financial crisis of 2007 and 2008, combined with the perceived lack of need for democratic institutions that were considered essential for Western security until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

With the financial meltdown of 2007 and 2008, Seib noted, “Real people felt real pain, and they believed the pain was inflicted upon them, that it was not inevitable, and that it was either the mistakes or the greed of the elites that produced that pain. In the U.S., a couple of big financial institutions failed, but otherwise the government bailed everybody else out. Nobody went to jail, and meanwhile tens of thousands of Americans lost their homes in the process.”

With the rise of populism as a backlash movement, “Economic policies based on free trade and flexible labor markets came under attack. Cultural norms celebrating diversity and promoting immigration lost traction; international agreements and institutions yielded ground to nationalist forces,” he said.

The rise of populism in the U.S., and its impact on domestic and foreign policy, is being shaped by Donald Trump’s personal brand of populism, Seib pointed out.

“Donald Trump is not an ideological figure. He doesn’t have an ideology of the left, or an ideology of the right. He doesn’t really have an ideology at all. He’s in the center in that sense, but he is interested in smashing the norms and the institutions that preceded him. So, as a result, I think this populism tells you less about actual policy trends than may seem likely.”
To reinforce this point, Seib shared the latest Wall Street Journal–NBC News poll, which he oversees, citing results on trade, immigration, and climate change.

On trade, 57% of Americans said trade is good for America. Among Trump voters, only 39% said trade was good for America. On immigration, 60% of all Americans said immigration helps the nation, but only 28% of core Trump voters said it helps America. When asked about climate change in this April poll, 67% of all Americans said taking some action is necessary, but only 27% of Trump supporters thought that was the case.

But these kinds of results, he said, do not mean what’s commonly assumed, that this brand of populism translates into isolationism. “In fact, in that April survey, our pollsters were somewhat stunned to find that there is something approaching an actual consensus across the two parties and even among Trump supporters and everybody else on America’s role in the world.

“We asked whether America should be more or less actively involved in world affairs, and roughly half of Americans overall said ‘more involved.’ And that included precisely half of core Trump supporters as well. It also included about half of Republicans, about half of Democrats, and just under half of independents. In fact, Trump supporters were actually slightly more inclined than other Republicans to say America should be more involved in the world. America’s role in the world actually is one of those rare issues these days where there’s not a partisan and ideological divide, and no obvious populist impulse. One of our pollsters called this a ‘wow’ finding, because you don’t see this on almost any issue these days.”

Seib has looked at Pentagon data to see if America is withdrawing and downsizing America’s security commitments abroad. “After all, Donald Trump said in the campaign that America’s doing too much work that ought to be left for our allies, and we should be paying more attention to what’s happening at home and not be so involved in the world.”

Despite Trump’s rhetoric, Pentagon figures show that the deployment of American troops overseas has gone up rather than down over the last year. Troop levels are broader up overall, and they are up specifically and notably in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, and Bahrain, as well as in other places. In addition, the Trump administration has added an additional carrier battle group to the Pacific, and has reiterated America’s support for Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization charter, which commits the U.S. to defend its European allies if they’re attacked.

So why this willingness to engage in the world to some extent amidst all this populism? According to Seib, “There’s undoubtedly an impulse among some populists that says that only an activist U.S. abroad on the security front can protect them from outside forces and institutions they really don’t trust. There is a fear of the outsider; there’s also therefore a desire for the U.S. government to protect them from these outsiders. And that happens to be kind of the opposite of an isolationist tendency.”

Seib summarized, saying that populism produces “an identifiable nativist tendency, a keep-the-foreigners-out impulse, and it definitely has an adverse impact on the views of the virtues of the global economy. Globalization is seen as a bad thing in terms of … individual economic welfare and well-being. But it does not necessarily, at least, produce isolationist sentiments as commonly defined. And so, bottom line, is that, like everything else in Donald Trump’s Washington, it’s complicated, and not exactly what it seems.”

“America’s role in the world … is one of those rare issues these days where there’s not a partisan and ideological divide, and no obvious populist impulse.”

GERALD SEIB is a columnist and former Washington bureau chief of The Wall Street Journal. He has also been a frequent commentator on Washington affairs for CNN, CNBC, the BBC, Fox Business Network, and other cable networks. Seib has covered the Pentagon, State Department, White House and the presidency. Based in Cairo during the 1980s, he covered the Middle East. Recipient of many of journalism’s major honors, he won the Merriman Smith award for coverage of the presidency under deadline; the Aldo Beckman award for coverage of the White House and the presidency; and the Gerald R. Ford Foundation prize for distinguished reporting on the presidency. The Georgetown University Institute of Diplomacy awarded him the Weintal Prize for his coverage of the Gulf War. He was part of the Journal team that won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize in the “breaking news” category for its coverage of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. In 2004, the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas named Seib winner of the William Allen White Foundation’s national citation. In 2012 he was awarded the Loeb lifetime achievement award for contributions to business and financial journalism. Seib earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Kansas.
Goodwin began his presentation on the populist revolt in Europe by pointing out that Brits were just as shocked by the outcome of the 2016 Brexit vote as Americans were by the outcome of the subsequent U.S. presidential election. Just weeks before the June 23 referendum, 95% of 300 UK experts surveyed expected Brexit to be voted down, about the same percent as that of U.S. experts who, just before November 2016, expected Donald Trump to be defeated. “We seem to have more data than ever before,” mused Goodwin, “yet we are constantly getting the public mood wrong.”

He then asked whether Western Europe is at the end of this period of volatility and change, as many optimists hope, or only at the beginning. After listing displays of populist strength in such countries as France, Hungary, Britain, and Poland, Goodwin pointed out that these are countries with traditionally liberal majorities, successful economies, generous social support systems, and low unemployment. These positive factors led many economists, he said, to believe that the end of volatility was near. Their optimism was augmented by the assumption that populist unrest was more characteristic of older, more conservative voters, a declining demographic, than of the younger population, who by 2022 will outnumber the older pro-Brexit folks. Such optimists also point to the ephemeral nature of most populist protests in Europe’s recent past.

Goodwin cautioned, however, that pessimists, those who feel that the “volatility is not just back, but is here to stay,” cite different evidence, pointing out that education, not age, is the “key divide” between those who support Brexit (75% of those with “no qualifications”) and those who oppose it (76% among school graduates), margins similar to those among pro/Trump and anti-Trump voters in the U.S. This divide is likely to become more important as university enrollments decline in both the U.S. and Britain, for the first time since 1945.

Another difference between the short-lived populist outbursts of the past and today’s is that now voting groups that had not bonded together before are doing so. This phenomenon began, Goodwin noted, as far back as 1995, when “Jean-Marie Le Pen became the most popular politician” among France’s working class. In short, “This is not a new crisis.”

“And it isn’t just a workers’ revolt,” Goodwin added, presenting a chart showing “Affluent Euroskeptics” and older working class members, who together make up almost 40 percent of the UK population, voting about 75% for Brexit. What these people had in common was that “they didn’t see the case for the EU, they felt very anxious over migration and ethnic change, and they didn’t trust the political establishment.”

Another cause of change, Goodwin said is “the demise of the old anchors of Western democracy.” The main such anchor was the predominant role in Western European governance of the social democratic political parties until 2006, when their share of the vote across Europe began to “fall off.
Matthew J. Goodwin is an academic, writer, and speaker known for his work on British and European politics, populism, Brexit and elections. He is Professor of Politics at Rutherford College, University of Kent, and Senior Visiting Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House. Goodwin is the author of five books, including the 2015 UK Political Book of the Year, Revolt on the Right (Routledge), as well as Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union (Cambridge University Press). He has published dozens of academic studies and research reports with Chatham House on European politics and populism. Goodwin writes regularly for international media, including the New York Times, Politico, and Financial Times. From 2011 to 2015, he sat on the UK government’s working group on tackling prejudice and has advised many governments and departments, including Number 10 Downing Street and the U.S. State Department.
Evan Medeiros stressed the uncertainty inherent in assessing China and the future of U.S. relations with China. He said that China has both strengths and weaknesses, and our forecasts depend on whether we emphasize the strengths or the weaknesses.

There is great diversity in U.S. relations with China, according to Medeiros, with elements of both cooperation and competition in different domains of interaction.

We must recognize China’s global power economically and the fact that it has a global diplomatic presence. It has become a superpower in IT. But it also has serious weaknesses as a global power, Medeiros said. Its economy has deep structural imbalances, a heavy burden of state debt, an aging population (China fears “growing old before it grows rich”), severe environmental stresses, and restive ethnic national minorities as well as uneasy relations with Taiwan and Hong Kong. China depends on imported oil and gas, despite its efforts to increase the use of renewable energy sources.

The challenges we face in our dealings with China are in multiple dimensions, according to the former advisor to President Obama on the Asia Pacific. We compete in the technology realm as well as the military realm, he said.

He described China as both a revisionist power (i.e., seeking to alter the global balance of power) and a conservative one. On the one hand, China is engaged in territorial disputes with neighboring states in the East China and South China Seas and competing with us over shaping the rules of trade. On the other hand, the new organizational infrastructure that China is building, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, are parallel to—not in conflict with—existing international financial organizations.

Perhaps the best way to characterize China in relations with the U.S., he said, is to borrow Stephen Colbert’s term, “frenemy.”

Medeiros told the conference audience that Xi Jinping, China’s president and Communist Party General Secretary, is highly confident and sees himself as equal in stature to Mao and Deng Xiaoping. Xi believes that U.S. and Western power generally are declining, whereas China’s power is ascending. So he focuses on opportunities for China in the global arena.

However, added Medeiros, we should not forget that the U.S. has strengths. To be sure, he said, President Trump generates real trepidation in Asia, for his protectionist instincts and his withdrawal from the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership). “But our relationship with China is mature,” said Medeiros. “We should remember that we have had many more years of diplomatic and economic relations with China than we had when China was pursuing Maoist policies.”

China sees the U.S. as a declining power that nevertheless is trying to contain China. Chinese leaders often complain that the U.S. does not respect China or recognize its rightful position in world affairs. “It is paradoxically the case,” Medeiros said, “that the United States is necessary to China’s success, as a major market for China, while at the same time the U.S. is China’s greatest threat.” Medeiros thinks we
Evan S. Medeiros is Managing Director for Asia at Eurasia Group. He had previously been Special Assistant to President Obama and Senior Director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council (NSC), serving for nearly six years as the president’s top advisor on the Asia-Pacific. While coordinating U.S. policy toward the Asia-Pacific across the areas of diplomacy, defense policy, economic policy, and intelligence affairs, he managed numerous high-level U.S.-China interactions. Medeiros had previously been a senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation, specializing in the international politics of East Asia, China’s foreign and national security policies, and U.S.-China relations. He served as policy advisor to the special envoy for China and the U.S.-China Strategic Economic Dialogue at the Treasury Department. Medeiros holds a doctorate in international relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science; a master’s in international relations from the University of Cambridge; a master’s in China studies from the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies; and a bachelor’s degree in analytic philosophy from Bates College. His books and journal articles include *China’s International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism and Diversification* and (as co-author) *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise*.

China is seeking to use automation to accelerate its own economic growth and offset the gradual decline in the size of the labor force.

Responding to a question about the impact of automation on the loss of jobs in the U.S., Medeiros noted that China is seeking to use automation to accelerate its own economic growth and offset the gradual decline in the size of the labor force.

As to whether China will remain stable, Medeiros acknowledged that no one knows. At one time it was thought that an expanding middle class would bring pressure for greater political rights and representation, as happened in other Asian countries, such as Korea and Taiwan. So far, however, it appears that the middle class is content and is not seeking to democratize the regime. China’s political and social life is certainly freer than it was 30 years ago. But there is a definite tightening of the political controls under Xi Jinping.

Reported by Thomas F. Remington
Sovereignty, Solidarity, and New Rules for a Changing Global Economy

New approach needed in trade debate
Thea Mei Lee

Thea Mei Lee told the Camden Conference audience that she was there to explore the common threads and some of the deep divergences between the populist revolt or anti-globalism (as represented by Trump and Brexit and the rise of “nativist and neo-fascist” right wings) and what she calls “a progressive, pro-worker, pro-environment, pro-consumer, pro-democracy critique of the status quo.”

The answer to the problems that we’re facing, said Lee, does not lie in racism, isolationism, and xenophobia, but in finding and building support for a new set of global rules that address the core failure of current economic policy, including globalization and how we’ve engaged in the trade debate.

“We’ve yielded sovereignty in a back-door regulatory way, serving the interests of a small minority of corporate elite. And that’s why it’s so controversial, not because we’re in the global economy but because we’ve done it wrong.”

Lee pointed out that being part of the global economy requires a yielding of sovereignty in the sense that we agree in a treaty to give up some of our decision-making power. She argued that that necessary yielding needs to be transparent and deliberate and done to serve the broader good. One of the reasons that trade policy has been so controversial, she said, is that “We’ve yielded sovereignty in a back-door regulatory way, serving the interests of a small minority of corporate elite. And that’s why it’s so controversial, not because we’re in the global economy but because we’ve done it wrong.”

Looking back at the early days of NAFTA, Lee recalled that there was a debate in the mid-1990s about the minimum wage, “... and Newt Gingrich said that we can’t raise the minimum wage in the United States because we have NAFTA now, and American workers need to be competitive with Mexican workers. And that was, I think, really telling, because during the NAFTA debate, Newt Gingrich and none of the NAFTA supporters ever said, ‘Once we have NAFTA, we’re going to try to get your wages below Mexican wages.’ They didn’t say that was the reason for wanting NAFTA, but it was clearly top of mind for Newt Gingrich.”

So, if the goals of trade policy have been to erode workers’ bargaining power and to take away democratic policy space, Lee continued, “... that combination is deadly.”

As Lee sees it, the economic power of the Adelsons and the Koch brothers and others has “chipped away at the social safety net, at ... labor standards and other protections that we’ve put in place to make capitalism work better, to make capitalism more humane, to share prosperity amongst the top and the bottom and the middle. And if we take those away, what we’re left with is Donald Trump.”

Lee provided some background on her own career as a trade economist at the Economic Policy Institute in the early 1990s, during the NAFTA debate, and during the debate about the World Trade Organization. She spent another 20 years at the AFL-CIO.

“And so I have been in the room, I have been in hand-to-hand combat over trade policy since 1991, around not just, ‘should we have free trade or protectionism’—which is a stupid question, it doesn’t really exist. There aren’t two choices here. There are an infinite number of choices. How are we going to engage in the global economy? Who do the rules protect? ... I’ve been involved both in terms of the negotiation of each of those trade agreements and been an adviser to the U.S. government around that, but also congressional debates over passage, which were pretty rough. And I’m covered with bruises and scars to prove it.”
During the NAFTA debate, Lee continued, there was what she called “a basic smug fiction” that “trade is good for everyone all the time.” Going deeper, she said, we can look at, for example, the Stopher Samuelson theorem, which says trade agreements produce winners and losers. In a country like the United States, a country relatively abundant in skill and capital, she said, the likely losers will be what’s called less-skilled workers.

“And so the prediction of the economic model is that those folks will be hurt, that they’ll lose jobs, their wages will be eroded as a consequence of opening trade for the United States with a country like Mexico. But that’s two-thirds—that was at the time—two-thirds of the U.S. workforce. So you actually had an economic model predicting that you would have a disproportionate negative impact on working people, and that was ignored by people.”

Economists would point out, said Lee, that it would be possible to tax the winners and compensate the losers, so that everybody is better off. “Sure, it would be possible, but that is a theoretical possibility and has never happened in the history of humanity. We didn’t do it in NAFTA. Not only did we not tax the winners and compensate the losers, we pretty much doubled down on the opposite, where we cut taxes for the wealthy, and we cut social protections for working people. And we wonder why everybody’s so grumpy.”

Ultimately, Lee said, labor and environment side agreements were tacked onto NAFTA as an afterthought ...“and they were as weak as they were designed to be. But the biggest obstacle over [the 25 years since] was the complacency and the arrogance of the trade elite in both the Democratic and Republican parties, with the full cooperation of the media.”

Lee doesn’t agree with those who see automation and technology as the main problems for working people, pointing to “the concerted attack on unions at the state and federal level; the reluctance to pursue consistent full-employment macro policy; privatization; deregulation; the failure to invest in social capital and infrastructure; the erosion of labor standards, including the minimum wage; the erosion of the social safety net ... the rise of finance over the real economy; and the wrong kind of globalization.”

If we let Donald Trump make us competitive, said Lee, we will get there the wrong way. She cited the new tax bill and the attack on regulations, saying “You see it with [Donald Trump’s] continued attack on working people. So that is the opposite of the kinds of fixes we need in the global economy.”

“The whole goal,” Lee concluded, “...is that if you think about what’s wrong with globalization as an attack on worker’s bargaining power and democracy, then you have the road forward to reverse that. Because we need to figure out in the U.S. economy today, how do we rebuild workers’ bargaining power, how do we strengthen unions and strengthen non-union alternatives so that workers have a real voice at their workplace and in the economy. And ... we need to claim sovereignty where we need it most, in industrial policy, fiscal and monetary policy, the ability to create and nurture good jobs, to protect the environment, consumer safety, and worker rights and not the sovereignty that we eroded in protecting corporate profits and corporate interests. So we can do that. That’s my optimistic last note.”

Reported by Ann G. Cole

With NAFTA, “we cut taxes for the wealthy, and we cut social protections for working people. And we wonder why everybody’s so grumpy.”

THEA MEI LEE is President of the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) in Washington, DC. Previously, she had served as Deputy Chief of Staff and as Policy Director and Chief International Economist at the AFL-CIO. She has earlier worked as an international trade economist at EPI and as an editor at Dollars & Sense magazine in Boston. Lee has spent her career advocating on behalf of working families in the national policy debate, focusing on wage inequality, workers’ rights, and fair trade, among other issues. She played a key role in the management of the 12.5 million–member AFL-CIO, helping to craft a vision for the organization and implement its policy agenda. She has authored numerous publications, including A Field Guide to the Global Economy. Her research projects have included reports on the North American Free Trade Agreement, on the impact of international trade on U.S. wage inequality, and on the domestic steel and textile industries. She has served on the State Department Advisory Committee on International Economic Policy, the Export-Import Bank Advisory Committee, and the board of directors of the National Bureau of Economic Research. Lee holds a master’s degree in economics from the University of Michigan and a bachelor’s degree from Smith College.
When listening to Avril Haines, it becomes very evident that her passion for international law is the driver of her concerns and her work. Her comments to the Camden Conference show a structured and disciplined approach to tackling the threats that world disorder poses to America’s security.

Haines’ premise underlines the fact that America’s security is based on a framework and mechanisms that focus on the threats our country faces and how we deal with them in a multinational, multilateral fashion.

Haines insisted that the United States continue to seek and advance the process of creating and protecting international order by supporting international treaties and conventions. Such efforts to support international cooperation are our only assurance, she said, that international order will be maintained and our security guaranteed.

Furthermore she said, the United States must lead to assure an international world order that promotes peace, security, and opportunities for effective development through stronger cooperation to meet global threats and challenges.

In support of her thesis, Haines noted that since 1960 more than 800 treaties have been ratified by the U.S. Senate. All of these treaties have in some measure dealt with and mitigated a variety of threats. Between 1995 and 2000, the Senate ratified 23 treaties, many of them of great importance to U.S. security and business. These treaties ratified agreements on law enforcement, chemical weapons, the environment, and terrorism. Twenty-one treaties were approved between 2009 and 2016. Presidents Bush and Obama both tried to push for the passage of a number of treaties that supported the creation of organizations to help in defining and improving world order, but neither was capable of convincing Congress. Haines pointed out that since President Trump was elected in 2016, not one treaty has been approved.

She noted that World War II was fought to restore international order. We have, over the last 70 years, benefited from these efforts and those that came before. These efforts have been hard fought but they must be maintained within the framework that has evolved. She stated that among the treaties that we take for granted or never think about, treaties and international conventions developed for our benefit, are those that support the internet, telephone service, the Postal Service, and the international civil aviation agreements that define the rules for international plane travel.

Haines emphasized the importance of agreements that affect our health and welfare. She cited the case of Ebola. This pathogen, if unchecked, could have spread quickly and lethally all over the world but for the treaties and agreements with the World Health Organization. Furthermore, at the time of the world recession, said Haines, we were able to depend on the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to help other nations whose economies were under siege. In other cases, the United Nations peacekeeping forces have maintained a fragile peace in places such as Kashmir, South...
Sudan, and Haiti. Intellectual property agreements protect American businesses. Such agreements also protect American corporations from double taxation when doing business overseas. Finally, Haines pointed out, other agreements we rely on include treaties on law enforcement, extradition, terrorism, and the drug trade that have all been put in place for our benefit and through international mediation.

Haines asked, “What do these agreements cost us?” implying that the cost is minimal and the protection necessary. She added with some concern that “In the context of current domestic politics, we have been unable to have what is essentially an honest, nuanced conversation about international agreements and international engagements.” The fact that “over 50 percent of Americans don’t wish to engage, and we have not been able to effectively articulate the importance of engaging or not engaging,” is going to be detrimental to our future and is a threat to our security.

To support this contention, Haines emphasized that internet and cyber attacks are a cheap but effective way to reach our most vulnerable side. We are at risk because 90% of our population is on the internet. Here is an example of how we benefit from a high-value asset, and yet our enemies can take action very inexpensively, in a way that is outside international law, by attacking us through the internet. President Obama tried to remedy this situation but, said Haines, “We have been unable to flesh out a multilateral framework to create a mechanism and develop the necessary treaties” to obviate these cyber threats.

The Law of the Sea is a good example of a highly effective treaty that controls freedom of navigation and the general rules that define the norms of international behavior on the sea. Haines pointed out that “These rules have provided the framework for a consensus and give us all the strength to respond in an appropriate and proportional way with the sense that we are engaged in an agreed-upon way.”

Haines stressed that it seemed incomprehensible that 57 percent of Americans should feel that we should disengage and that other countries should be left to their own devices. “This is so unrealistic from a national security and policy perspective,” she said. The national security issues that require international engagement and cooperation are numerous and include infectious diseases that require the attention of the entire world to limit their spread. States that fail are often attacked by terrorist groups that take advantage of collapsing economies. These situations, said Haines, require our involvement to keep the threat of terrorism from spreading and affecting our national security. Cyber attacks can come from anywhere and affect our national security. The proliferation of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons is a great danger to the world and to our security. We must manage the threat, Haines said, before it reaches our shores. To create the mechanisms to deter these threats, we must understand what is happening in the world so we can detect and disrupt threats before they reach our shores.

“In the context of current domestic politics, we have been unable to have ... an honest, nuanced conversation about international agreements and international engagements.”

“The key piece of managing and establishing international order that makes sense is to establish relationships, partnerships, and mechanisms ... to mitigate the threats to our security.”

“The key piece of managing and establishing international order that makes sense is to establish relationships, partnerships and mechanisms ... to mitigate the threats to our security.” Since it is impossible to maintain our own security without working to develop the framework of international order, “We must set up the mechanisms that allow us to work with other countries to create the context for those places to become resilient and give them the ability to solve their problems. We must help other countries to address the drivers of the threats that affect their security, and we should be able to manage these issues without having to use force.”

In the final analysis, Haines noted, the only way that the United States can maintain its security in the future is to engage with the world. Therefore we must continue to prepare the necessary framework of treaties and bring them to the Senate for bipartisan approval. Haines was adamant that to assure that we are in a position to meet the threats to our international business, our cyber security, our health, and every other form of danger that might threaten the United States, we must work with the world community to achieve and maintain world order.

Reported by Andrew Stancioff
Cleo Paskal introduced her presentation by saying, “We talked this morning about geopolitics and geoecono-

mics, and now I am going to add a third element, geophysical change. If you thought we had problems before,

just wait.

“The reason geophysical change is an issue is because as humans we tend to build into an environment that is already there. Understanding that is key to understanding the problems we are going to have going forward.” To illustrate her point, she showed a slide of castles and forts built through the ages on mountaintops with ample water supplies.

Closer to home, Cleo charmingly listed the many physical assets of Camden—the harbor, the river, etc.—that made it an attractive place to settle. “It was inevitable, given the topog-

raphy of the area, that Camden would become Camden.”

Turning to the subject of airports, Paskal pointed out that airports require a large amount of flat land, so that means usually they’re either in a river valley, or they’re on the coast.

“The result is that if you look at airports around the world,” said Paskal, “they’re turning more into ports than air-

ports. They’re flooding all over the place. This is a real logistical problem. I’ve worked more on the defense and security side,... [where] we also have a lot of installations in very, very bad locations.”

During Hurricane Katrina, Keesler AFB near New Orleans had to scramble the planes and evacuate personnel, Paskal said, so not only did the base not become a security provider, but it also became a security sink. “This new factor of climate change is forcing a re-evaluation in how we do strategic analysis. But it is very important to remember it is not just cli-

mate change.”

The following slide, showing all the hurricanes in the U.S. Atlantic Basin from 1851 to 2005, each hurricane track repre-

sented by a thin red line, was virtually one big, red blot. “If you build in a hurricane track, that means you are going to be hit by a hurricane at some point.”

The title of the next slide was “Geostrategic = geopoliti-

cal + geoecologic + geophysical.” Pointing to an illustration of a Chinese icebreaker in the Arctic, Paskal said, “We missed a very big geo-physical change when it came to this. ... China surely can afford to build ships. With the geophysical change in the world it is almost inevitable that China would look at the Arctic very aggressively.” How we interpret this, she said, depends on our perception.

The big question is whether China’s economy will grow, stagnate, or contract by 2022. The Australian strategic com-

munity, said Paskal, thinks it will grow. So the business and political community made the decision that “Australia needs to ride the dragon, and it will have definite strategic consequences.” Opinion in the Australian strategic community is that the U.S. should share power in the Pacific with China, and several Australian prime ministers have advocated for cutting ties with U.S. foreign policy. “That would be a real problem for us,” Paskal continued. “Australia is a Five Eyes intelligence-sharing partner with the West. It is a key compo-

nent in the way we interact with the Pacific and with Indone-

sia. This multilateral agreement has been very helpful to us for 50–60 years. If Australia starts to weaken, we have a prob-

lem. The Chinese are very happy for us to have a problem, and so they have been looking for ways to accelerate that.”

The Australian political system allows overt foreign con-

tributions to political candidates. “A Chinese official could give a suitcase full of cash to an Australian politician,” said
"If you have a boring, rectangular country, you get 200 nautical miles off your coastline. If it floods and retreats, it is unclear whether your coastline retreats along with it."

Paskal, “and it is legal.”

Paskal argues that we need to start to rethink how these changing dynamics could be cascading through very large and very important defense and security architecture. We are seeing it affect positioning already, she said. The Australians gave the U.S. a hard time about stationing 1500 troops in Darwin on the north coast of Australia. Then they leased the entire port to a Chinese government company. This ambiguity in positioning is extremely problematic, according to Paskal, and is based on the assumption that the Chinese economy will continue to grow. The Chinese are practicing incrementalism, building islands, etc., testing the limits.

“At what point does the U.S. respond?” Paskal asked. The text of the next slide read, “Will the U.S. militarily defend Indo-Pacific allies in a time of crisis?” and the next one, “The Rudd Government of Australia has acknowledged the supremacy of the U.S. has faded and Australia is preparing for an uncertain future in which it can no longer rely on the protection of its main ally.”

If the 20th century was the Atlantic Century, it is very likely the 21st century will be the Indo-Pacific Century, said Paskal. If the U.S. may not be your sole security provider, she noted, what you’re starting to see is more push toward towards things like broader security constructs, including the U.S., Australia, Japan, and India. Parts of that triangle already have bilateral agreements. Japan is paying for 300,000 young Indians to spend three to five years in Japan for tech training. “That is strategic,” Paskal said. The Pentagon, she added, has established a special cell to speed up its defense ties with India.

“So what about the third ‘geo’—geophysical change? Part of the problem is, just as with our physical infrastructure, such as our airports, our legal infrastructure assumes the environment that it governs will not change. That is true of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, a very useful document, according to Paskal, who said it has the same flaws. “This is one of them. If you have a boring, rectangular country, you get 200 nautical miles off your coastline. If it floods and retreats, it is unclear whether your coastline retreats along with it.” If you have an island, you can claim a 200-mile exclusive economic zone around it. “We have a situation in which entire islands can disappear,” said Paskal. The Chinese, not satisfied with their natural islands, have been building islands at a very fast rate. Some of these are clearly defense installations, Paskal said.

Paskal showed a map of the Pacific in which all of the U.S. exclusive economic zones were colored red. The U.S. has the most territory; France comes second. “They have bases there, left over from nuclear testing. France and Australia share a maritime border. France is much more engaged in a naval way. Watch for these ‘post EU’ foreign policies developing out of Europe, particularly out of France.”

C L E O  P A S K A L is an associate fellow in the Energy, Environment and Resources Department of Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, in London. She specializes in the confluence of the “three geos” (the geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geophysical). Her research includes the geopolitical, security, and economic implications of environmental change (including climate change) and Arctic and Pacific security. Paskal is an adjunct faculty member in Geopolitics at Manipal University, India and adjunct professor of Global Change in the School of Communication and Management Studies, Kochi, India. As a Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Visiting Fellow, she leads a multi-year research project at the University of Montreal looking at strategic shifts in the Indo-Pacific region. She has taught at the U.S. Army War College, the Royal College of Defence Studies (UK), the National Defence College (India), and the National Defence College (Oman). Her book Global Warring: How Environmental, Economic, and Political Crises Will Redraw the World Map won multiple awards. Her most recent book, Spielball Erde (co-authored with German TV news anchor Claus Kleber), focuses on the security implications of climate change. She has been a columnist for Canada’s National Post and Toronto Star, a BBC radio producer, and author of an Emmy-winning documentary television series.

“Geography makes history, but right now environmental change is remaking geography.”

Paskal concluded by observing that China is very good at long-term planning, but that doesn’t mean the plan is any good. They can explore the Arctic while tolerating vulnerability at home. For example, Shanghai is very close to sea level, but the Chinese go on building chemical plants there. Every summer hundreds of thousands of people are evacuated from Shanghai in the path of typhoons.

The last slide: “Geography makes history, but right now environmental change is remaking geography.”

► Reported by Dave Jackson
Natalie Nougayrède began by explaining the title of her presentation and why she chose it. She defined “fort” as “the rules-based liberal international order ... treaties that affect our lives ...” and she quoted an unnamed Obama administration official as saying, to a group of Europeans, “The task for Europe is to hold down the fort, to keep the momentum of Western-built institutions and values moving forward.” She also quoted German Chancellor Angela Merkel that Europe must “take our fate into our own hands.”

Before answering the question raised in the title, Nougayrède emphasized how deeply the Putin regime is intertwined with war and noted that Europe has for some time dealt with Russian meddling, referencing the Russian cyber attack in Estonia in 2007. She also commented on how deeply Cold War Europe’s destiny has been tied to U.S. foreign policy choices and, going back in history, how costly was the U.S. decision not to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, which founded the League of Nations. Yet, “The now 60-year-old European project would never have been possible without U.S. commitment, without the U.S. security umbrella that created the conditions for cooperation and reconciliation that made it possible. ... Europe has largely been a free rider for seven decades.”

Having established that contextual framework, Nougayrède went on to consider the challenges Europe faces and how they relate to U.S. foreign policy, and then to argue that:

► News of Europe’s demise is exaggerated;
► Europe can hold part of the fort; in the end the U.S. will need Europe, not just the other way around;
► Personalities of leaders matter immensely.

The U.S., the UK, and continental Europe face many similar challenges, Nougayrède said: distrust of the elites, middle class disgruntlement in the face of globalization, the disruptions that come with technological revolutions, fake news, mainstream politics’ being hollowed out and replaced by radical discourse both left and right. “Of the three [areas], continental Europe suffers alone from its geographical position on the doorstep of the Middle East and on the doorstep of North Africa,” said Nougayrède. “Instability and chaos have spilled into Europe from the outside. U.S. policies in the Middle East have had an impact on Europe few U.S. policymakers ever cared to anticipate.”

In addition, she noted, Trump’s dislike of the EU, his applause of Brexit, and his view of NATO as obsolete have all been a boon to nativist, nationalist forces on the Continent.

What happens on its borders seriously impacts continental Europe, regardless of the cause, according to Nougayrède. “Syria is a European crisis as well as a Middle Eastern crisis...
Some European officials believe it was the American failure to uphold red lines in Syria that emboldened Putin to act in Ukraine and then to enter Syria.

... and it is far from over. Historians may one day tell us the degree to which we in the West wasted a chance to push Bashar Al Assad toward the negotiating table for a settlement deal because insufficient pressure was brought to bear.” In addition, “Some European officials believe it was the American failure to uphold red lines in Syria that emboldened Putin to act in Ukraine and then to enter Syria.” ...

However, Nougayrède emphasized, news of Europe’s demise is exaggerated: Grexit didn’t happen, the Eurozone didn’t collapse, Le Pen didn’t win, there is no Brexit domino effect, and EU sanctions against Russia held. And while there are important and worrisome flashpoints—Poland has turned away from democracy, as has Hungary; the far right in Austria controls key ministries—no one is talking of leaving the EU. In Poland, “however strained its relations with EU institutions, popular support for EU membership is among the highest in Europe.” In Italy, “No one is campaigning on leaving the EU, or pulling out of the common currency. Brexit is “turning into a model of what goes wrong when you choose to leave the EU.”

So far the French are giving Macron a chance to carry out “much-needed, hopefully job-creating, reforms.” Merkel is weakened, but “If the coalition deal with the Social Democrats is confirmed, that creates an opening for a weakened, but “If the coalition deal with the Social Democrats is confirmed, that creates an opening for a stronger Franco-German engine at the heart of Europe.”

That all means, said Nougayrède, that Europe can hold the fort, but not all of it. As a step toward addressing some of the new realities of Europe’s deteriorated security environment, leaders are trying to deepen and showcase defense cooperation. Although a European Defense Union may be far off, there are efforts to strengthen EU external borders and to produce a workable common asylum and immigration policy. The European Defense Fund is being established, and there is a push to jump-start the EU enlargement process in the Balkans.

That is all positive, according to Nougayrède, but “There is no Plan B for European defense guarantees that would ever be an alternative to NATO.”

What does that mean for the U.S.? “The U.S. will have a choice in the era of global disorder—does it want to stand alone, or does it need partners and allies?”

“Europe today,” said Nougayrède, “is the last defender of a rules-based liberal international order.” As she sees things, Europe is where the U.S. can find, if it looks for it, constructive support on key international challenges—anti-terrorism, development, managing the rise of China, non-proliferation, climate change. When the U.S. and Europe work side by side, things can get done. If the U.S. is not interested in Europe’s input, said Nougayrède, it will be more isolated.

According to the speaker, the lack of clarity on the U.S. position and Trump’s low popularity ratings in Europe have created two risks: We might see the rise of anti-Americanism, especially in Germany, and we might see European hedging, with countries turning to the highest bidder, playing on the rivalries of Russia, China, and Turkey.

It is, in the end, the people who matter, Nougayrède said. Macron is just 40 and was elected never having held public office and without the support of any established party. But he has a clear understanding of the 1958 Constitution, she said, and is focused on increasing France’s role in Europe. Macron calls himself a progressive and behaves like a pragmatist. While he opposes Trump, he clearly is trying to work with him.

Macron is new, noted Nougayrède, and Merkel may not finish out her term. Yet they share a view of France’s importance. Merkel has said that “Germany cannot be strong without a strong Europe, and Europe cannot be strong without a strong France.” Said Nougayrède, Merkel is the first German chancellor to suggest the notion of a post-American Europe.

What does all this mean? There are things that can no longer be taken for granted, Nougayrède said. The way the U.S. has at times benefited from European solidarity is no longer guaranteed. “As unbalanced as Europe’s power may be compared to the United States,” she added, “core interests, whether they are defined as national interests or pan-European continental interests, will dictate positions—not necessarily old friendships.”

Reported by Judy Stein

Natalie Nougayrède is a columnist, editorial writer and foreign affairs commentator for the British newspaper the Guardian. Before joining the Guardian in 2014, she served as executive editor and managing editor of France’s Le Monde, the first woman to lead the paper since its founding in 1944. Nougayrède promoted digital and editorial transformation for Le Monde, focusing particularly on investigative journalism, original content, and the consolidation of Le Monde’s standing as the largest information website in France. She began her career covering events in Eastern Europe following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the breakup of Czechoslovakia. In 1997 she joined Le Monde as foreign and diplomatic correspondent and later became Moscow bureau chief. She has been honored with two major French journalism prizes, the Prix de la Presse Diplomatique (2004) and the Albert Londres award (2005), both for her coverage of the Chechen conflict and the attack on the school in Beslan, Russia. She has contributed to books on Vladimir Putin’s Russia and on Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya. Nougayrède graduated from the Institut d’Études Politiques in Strasbourg, then completed her education in Paris at the Centre de Formation des Journalistes.
Chas Freeman, a retired American diplomat fluent in both Chinese and Arabic, has wide-ranging international expertise: He acted as President Nixon’s interpreter during his first visit to China in 1972 and served as the American ambassador to Saudi Arabia in the late 1980s.

Freeman, in a talk entitled “This Too Shall Pass,” gave a sobering view of our current international and domestic situation, though, as the title indicated, with the right leadership, he can envision a better future.

Reviewing the world of the last half century, Freeman noted that while Americans can be justly proud of what we accomplished when we led the world—“our leadership institutionalized international norms that helped expand human liberty”—the world is now concerned with mitigating the “knock-on effects of the rapid contraction of American global influence.” The 20th century, Freeman observed, was rightly called “the American century,” but as the U.S. retreats, the world is currently in “a messy transition” to a world based on regional, not global, balances of power. Great power rivalries have returned: “War is back as an accepted means of adjusting the policies, borders, and international alignments of nations.”

As examples, he cited the anarchy in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria as a result of foreign intervention. The end result: a decrease in international law and an increasing “reversion to the lawlessness of the pre-modern era.” Referring to the title of this year’s conference, Freeman said, “The new world disorder is one in which all fights are local, might commonly makes right, refugees are plentiful, and American charitable responses to human misery are newly wanting.”

And worse, the key institutions of international cooperation, such as the UN, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, are “atrophying under the impact of American disinterest, disengagement, and disinvestment.”

Not surprisingly, other nations—especially China—are responding to our decline. The irony is that the U.S. has not lost our “natural endowment,” which remains unmatched: the diversity of our population, the excellence of our universities, our heritage of freedom and of resilience and invention. With less than 5 percent of the world’s population, we have over 10 percent of its productive land and water resources. But, “on every level other than the promiscuous use of force, we are now underperforming.” Once the most admired of nations, “We are no longer a society that others seek to emulate.”

CHAS W. FREEMAN, JR. is an American diplomat and author with more than 30 years of service in the State and Defense Departments. His career began with assignments in India and Taiwan and on the State Department’s China desk. During President Richard Nixon’s first visit to the People’s Republic of China in 1972, Freeman was the principal interpreter. He was later appointed Deputy Director for Republic of China (Taiwan) affairs, followed by postings in Beijing and Bangkok. In 1986 he was appointed Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. He became United States Ambassador to Saudi Arabia in November 1989, serving during Operation Desert Storm. Freeman was a Distinguished Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies (1992-93); Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs (1993-94); and Distinguished Fellow, United States Institute of Peace (1994-95). In 1995 he became chairman of the board of Projects International, Inc, a firm arranging international joint ventures. Freeman is a past president of the Middle East Policy Council, co-chair of the U.S.-China Policy Foundation, and vice-chair of the Atlantic Council. He has been honored with two Distinguished Public Service Awards, three Presidential Meritorious Service Awards, and a Distinguished Honor Award. He speaks fluent Chinese, French, Spanish and Arabic.
The shock and awe of 9/11 was key in the corrosion of our democracy: We were panicked, “curtailing American liberties in the name of preserving them.” Congress surrendered to the president its constitutional power to authorize wars of choice, with successive presidents launching an unending series of military campaigns under the heading of “the global war on terrorism.” Financing these wars has led to an uncontrolled expansion of public debt, which Freeman believes “threatens an ultimate systemic collapse of the American economy and the society it sustains.”

Our wars over the past quarter century have been responsible for the permanent deaths of some 4,000,000 Muslims—a major reason for the growth of anti-American terrorism that directly undermines our domestic tranquility, leading to the impairment of due process and civil liberties. The result is “a nation in a whiny, belligerent frame of mind: We blame Russia for the way we vote; we are working ourselves into a frenzy of machismo about China; we blame everybody but ourselves for the mess in the Middle East, for our trade and balance of payments deficits, and for the de-industrialization of our job market.”

As we prepare ourselves for the future, we must decide what elements of the “liberal rule-bound international order”—which we were so instrumental in creating—we need to restore or perpetuate. “Even those who, like the Chinese and Russians, came late to the rule-bound order American leadership had built, prospered in it.” The world we led in “the American century” was risk-averse, applying a facsimile of the rule of law to all participants. It helped damp down the arms race and limit the risk of aggression by larger states against smaller ones.

As an example, Freeman cited the reaction to Iraq’s attempt to annex Kuwait: “Under U.S. leadership, the international community rallied to Kuwait’s defense. It did so as a matter of principle as well as strategic interest.”

But things have changed: The US now “routinely denounces others for not observing rules we ourselves no longer obey.” Without strong backing by the U.S., the rule-bound international order cannot survive. What is urgently needed is American reaffirmation of the “traditional values of Western civilization.” Otherwise, other values may upstage Western ones. Freeman specifically referred to China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” in this context. It will involve trillions of dollars of investment and entail agreements on trade, customs measures, and a variety of regulations involving 65 different countries. China is already setting up specialized courts to deal with such issues.

“What law—what rules—will these courts apply?” Freeman asked. The area involved includes 65 percent of the world’s population and over 40 percent of its GDP—enough to determine much of the future world order. “Will the U.S. be a participant or a bystander as this order is forged?”

In reflecting on that question, Freeman pointed out two key problems the U.S. faces in its international relations: our ineffective intelligence agencies and our bloated defense budget. These days, our intelligence establishment “tells our leaders what they want to hear,” thus enabling “delusional reasoning that misdirects policy planning to deal with the very real challenges our country faces.” Our defense budget has ceased to be a response to any realistic military challenge: “It is a jobs program.”

Freeman concluded by suggesting that we are now in a transition period to “some sort of new world order.” But, “Bravado backed by whiz-bang weaponry and an empty wallet will not shape events to our advantage.”

What needs to be done involves a long list of things: raising the national savings rate; boosting investment in human and physical infrastructure; raising educational standards; simplifying federal taxes; reforming labor-management relations and retraining redundant employees; adopting foreign best practices. And, above all, striving “for excellence in statecraft and diplomacy as an alternative to counterproductive efforts at military coercion of our rivals as well as of our allies, partners, and friends.”

Is it possible? Freeman concluded on a note of optimism: Somewhere “in our vast country, there is someone who sees what we need and can lead us to do it. Americans await this leadership. We know it is out there.”

.Reported by Mac Deford