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## Trump Returns U.S. to Realpolitik in World Affairs

President’s United Nations address marks return of U.S. foreign policy to practical considerations rather than moral calculations



By *Gerald F. Seib*

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Early in his maiden speech to the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday, President Donald Trump offered fellow world leaders the best, most concise summary he’s ever provided of his approach to world affairs: “We are guided by outcomes, not ideology,” he declared.

Having signaled that his listeners should be prepared for some blunt, hard-nosed pragmatism, Mr. Trump proceeded to deliver just that. In many ways, in fact, Mr. Trump’s address marked the return of American foreign policy to realpolitik: a set of principles and precepts based on practical considerations rather than philosophical or moral calculations.

And while his predecessors might have cloaked their threats and grievances in a rhetorical velvet glove while at the U.N., Mr. Trump took off that glove while delivering the most important and most revealing speech of his young presidency.

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He declared that if the U.S. is forced to defend against North Korea’s nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, “we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea.” In the president’s terminology, Kim Jong Un wasn’t the leader of North Korea, but rather the “Rocket Man...on a suicide mission.”

Iran, a country his predecessor spent years seeking to engage, was in Mr. Trump's description a nation engaged in the "pursuit of death and destruction." As for the nuclear deal with Iran that President Barack Obama's team labored for years to negotiate, Mr. Trump branded it "one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United States has ever entered into" and "an embarrassment."

Mr. Trump also warned that the U.S. is prepared to take further, undefined steps to change the course of Venezuela's socialist regime. And, while he offered words of thanks to China and Russia for help on other matters, he indirectly called them out for their aggressive behavior in their neighborhoods:

"We must reject threats to sovereignty, from the Ukraine to the South China Sea. We must uphold respect for law, respect for borders and respect for culture, and the peaceful engagement these allow."

Both the stark nature of Mr. Trump's messages and his willingness to deliver them from the U.N. podium were unprecedented for an American president. The U.N. audience got Trumpism in its pure, unvarnished form.

In one of the most intriguing sections of the speech, Mr. Trump attempted to define what his "America First" approach to the presidency really means, in terms specifically designed to appeal to fellow world leaders nervous about the concept:

"As president of the United States, I will always put America first, just like you, as the leaders of your countries, will always and should always put your countries first. All responsible leaders have an obligation to serve their own citizens, and the nation-state remains the best vehicle for elevating the human condition."

That final line represented a dig at the notion that a global economy, instantaneous world-wide communications and the free flow of goods and people are making traditional national identities obsolete. The Trump message is the opposite: Nations and borders matter no less in the era of globalization.

Afterward, some said they found the president's bluntness refreshing, others alarming. But all who listened came away understanding that the Trump Doctrine is the doctrine of transactions: I am not disengaging from the world, he seemed to be saying, but rather engaging with it on my terms, and purely in pursuit of American interests.

The address had some broader strokes as well. In fact, it was almost two speeches back-to-back.

The first segment offered some of the more traditional odes to American ideals and leadership: "In America, we do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example for everyone to watch," Mr. Trump declared. "In America the people govern, the people rule and the people are sovereign."

From there, he moved into the second section, marked by direct messages to American foes. His barbed warnings to North Korea will get the most attention, and raise the question of whether such threats are more likely to scare North Korea away from nuclear weapons or deepen its belief they are needed for protection.

Yet the most dramatic departure from the approach of the Obama administration actually came elsewhere, in his discussion of Iran. Mr. Obama saw Iran as a country to be engaged and slowly pulled away from its revolutionary moorings and into the international mainstream.

Mr. Trump suggested no patience for such a course. Instead, he virtually called for Iranians to effect a regime change:

"Oppressive regimes cannot endure forever, and the day will come when the people will

face a choice: Will they continue down the path of poverty, bloodshed and terror, or will the Iranian people return to the nation's proud roots as a center of civilization, culture and wealth, where their people can be happy and prosperous once again?"

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