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PRINCIPLED CONSERVATISM IN AMERICA'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

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INTRODUCTION



The focus and direction of U.S. foreign and national security policy seems to be very much in flux right now, with both major American political parties to some degree or another wrestling with what the United States' role in the world should be, and what principles should underlie this engagement. American conservatism, traditionally the more hawkish of the camps, is itself internally divided – albeit more on domestic than foreign issues – having lost control of the presidency and the Senate in the last national elections, with all three political components of the federal government now in the hands of others.

Nearly 17 decades after the founding of the Republican Party in the great struggle against the immorality of human chattel slavery, there is no way of knowing how that party's internal struggles of identity, policy, and personalism will turn out, nor can one know exactly when — or under what circumstances — American voters will again return the party to a position of national power. Meanwhile, Democrats, having taken control of all the elected branches of the federal government, find themselves in the driver's seat, but remain also internally split over matters of foreign policy and national security.

For those in any political faction who have an enduring commitment to conservative principles, and who have

devoted their careers to advancing the interests of the American people in foreign affairs and national security policy, it may not seem entirely clear what to do while these struggles play out. Yet, one should bear in mind the words of Abraham Lincoln that we should make general intelligence, sound morality, and reverence for the Constitution and laws of our country the pillars for our national journey. Fidelity to these words can provide at least a partial antidote to the dangers of faction that our country's Founders understood so well. It is time for thoughtful men and women of conservative principle to use this time of flux to build a clear public vision and set of principles for future governance and policymaking. In that spirit, this paper offers some tentative thoughts on



how principled American conservatives should approach certain foreign policy and national security questions in the years ahead. The United States will need realistic and effective policies for dealing with a challenging world no matter who is in charge, and it is time to build a conceptual foundation for policymaking irrespective of which party or personality wins the day.

Many of the points made in this paper may seem like simple common sense. If so, that is a good thing, for indeed it is one of the greatest traditional strengths of American conservatism to be able to offer hard-headed common sense in the foreign policy and national security arena. Yet it is probably important to restate such seemingly simple wisdoms today as conservatives work to find their footing and repair their electoral fortunes. Whomever our national leaders are in the years ahead, this is a good moment for clear thinking that can help keep Americans working effectively together

in support of an agenda that will strengthen American security, prosperity, and greatness, that will confound our adversaries, and that will enable U.S. leaders to meet and overcome the many threats and challenges facing this great Republic today.

This paper is drafted from the perspective of an American who believes in conservative principles in policymaking and promoting our country's strength and status in the world, and in a willingness to meet foreign threats and challenges with muscularity as well as diplomacy. Whether or not it recognizes the fact right now, the United States needs principled conservative foreign policy and national security professionals, for our great Republic will most assuredly continue to face threats and challenges that call for clear-eyed American leadership and insight.

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I Our Focus: American Strength and Security

If there is a distinctive “brand” that principled conservatives bring to the policy arena, it is a devotion to and degree of intellectual and emotional comfort with American strength. Conservatives are neither afraid of nor embarrassed by our country’s might. Rather, conservatives embrace it and see it as a key to our nation’s success, and even as a force for good, in a dangerous world. In a complex and challenging world in which there is no shortage of authoritarian states hostile to rights-based democratic governance and eager to increase their own share of the global resource, influence, and status “pie,” there is need for more muscularity and resolve from the democracies – jointly and severally – rather than less. Such strength is a bulwark for liberty in difficult times, and it undergirds the freedoms of people in the United States and abroad.

With this in mind, conservatives seek to preserve, to augment, and to use that strength, above all else, for the enduring security and prosperity of the American people. Conservatives are convinced, moreover, that the wise exercise of American power and leadership will continue to augment international peace and security and to promote prosperity and stability within a free and open international order, as indeed it has for so many years in the past.

Principled conservatives understand that America’s leadership must be thoughtful in its pursuit of security and know that one must avoid absolutist or dogmatic rigidity. (It is the proper role of conservatives in politics generally to push back against soaringly ambitious, dangerously unrealistic, world-remaking enthusiasms, and against the overreaching that so often comes with ideological fixation.) They also understand the important roles that can often be played by negotiation and compromise – both at home and abroad – and by

skillful, subtle diplomacy in advancing U.S. security interests. Nevertheless, it is critical that conservatives always remain committed to advancing those interests, and our *default mode*, as it were, is to work to make our country as strong and secure as possible: at least first among equals, and ideally in a benign and open-hearted primacy.

Here lies a core focus for principled conservatives, and the value they most characteristically bring to the table in the foreign policy and national security community. Conservatives reject aspirations forcibly to remake the rest of the world in America’s image, not because they would not on some level *like* to see that but rather because they recognize that it is not *possible* to succeed on such terms. The U.S. will be *less* strong and less secure if we give ourselves over to, and bog ourselves down in, the enthusiasms of trying to remake the world through coercive means.

Nor are conservatives isolationists, however. To the contrary, conservatives believe strongly in engaging with the rest of the world – and in doing so forcefully if security requires it – in order to protect and advance U.S. national interests and make our country safer and the American people more secure. Principled conservatives recognize that for a United States with global interests in an interconnected world, to *retreat* from engagement is to sell out important U.S. interests and to empower adversaries who wish us harm.

Nor, for that matter, are conservatives unreflective internationalist cosmopolitans who fetishize international mechanisms, relationships, institutions, or treaties simply because they are “international,” thus seemingly somehow representing a broader and impliedly better or higher form of human community. Instead, conservatives prize such things where, and to the degree that, they contribute to our *American* national interests, to international peace and security, and to the advancement of the values we as *Americans* hold most dear. Where such international things do this, conservatives can indeed be said to be “internationalists,” albeit conditional

ones, but where they do *not* – or where, worse, they detract from American interests or impede their pursuit – conservatives are not.

Accordingly, conservatives are neither crusaders doomed to endless entanglement nor ostriches foolishly ceding ground to our adversaries, nor virtue-signaling, politically-correct “embracers” of the international and the global *per se*. Instead, principled conservatives seek sustained but realistically prudent engagements that place the security and prosperity of the American people first but recognize that America *does* have interests abroad that we need to protect – and an international role to play – in support of that very security and prosperity.

There is not always a bright-line standard for exactly what principled conservatism means in practice. Nevertheless, this approach provides an important guidepost for thoughtful, security-centered choice-making in a complex and dangerous environment. A prudentially conservative mindset can also offer a recurring corrective for the conceptual failings and occasional recklessness of rigidly ideological approaches to U.S. foreign policy.



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II

Great Power Competition

The United States is a hugely powerful and highly developed society of continuing geopolitical centrality, with a proud history of standing up for democracy and rights-based governance against the forces of intolerance and tyranny. No one is perfect, of course, and one must admit that the United States has not always lived up to its own values – though the fact that we have sometimes fallen short in no way detracts from the transcendent worth of the principles upon which this Republic was founded.

Either way, however, in a diverse world filled with states having forms of governance ranging from liberal democracy to ideological or religious dictatorship, containing divergent political cultures involved in various sorts of ideological and religious contestation, suffused by a kaleidoscope of non-state actors of every flavor, and buffeted by rapid and often disorienting socio-economic and technological changes and disruption, the United States' status and role will likely always be controversial and contested. We will thus continue to face threats and challenges from some who wish us ill, and who wish to discredit and diminish our founding principles.

Today, some of those who most wish us ill are powerful and sophisticated state-level adversaries, whose objective is to restructure the international order, in whole or in part, to their advantage and our disadvantage. The central competitive challenge of this era is presented by the rise of China, not as a democratizing, liberalizing power (as many vainly hoped for so long) but instead as an increasingly authoritarian, belligerent, and self-aggrandizing revisionist. China is keen to reconstruct the international system around itself in ways deeply threatening to our own country's

interests, to the future of democratic, rights-based governance in the world, and to the free and open international order of sovereign states upon which the freedom and autonomy of billions of people has depended for generations.

We also face grave challenges from Russia, which seeks to re-litigate what its brutal ruling regime finds distasteful about the peaceable post-Cold War strategic environment. Russia advances what it takes to be its own power and status through a dangerously risk-tolerant policy of international provocation and disruption – including invasions of its neighbors, the use of banned weapons of mass destruction on the soil of our allies, chronic violations of and contempt for treaty obligations, destabilizing nuclear and cyberspace saber-rattling, interference in electoral processes in multiple countries, violence and murder against critics at home and abroad, and foreign expeditionary adventurism.

Both of those powers also show no scruples about seeking to arm America's state-level regional adversaries with advanced weaponry, as well as to undermine and distort the effective operation of



valuable international institutions. Even as it continues to steal Western technology and use it to advance its geopolitical ambitions, moreover, China has been stepping up its efforts to promote and facilitate other countries' adoption of its grim and increasingly totalitarian model of technology-facilitated surveillance state oppression, making the 21st Century into yet another dangerous competition between socio-political "operating systems." These challenges from our state competitors present grave threats to the United States, to our allies, and to international peace and security.

We must organize and posture ourselves for effective and sustained long-term competition with our great power competitors across multiple domains of power. To succeed in this competition, moreover, we must work closely with others in order to coordinate responses to global revisionism among all likeminded friends and allies, especially (but not exclusively) the rights-based democracies of the world.

This focus upon competitive strategy vis-à-vis the revanchist powers of China and Russia in no way precludes cooperation with either or both of them where we have shared interests and where this serves our needs and those of international peace and security. Such cooperation may yet be possible, for instance, in using arms control to forestall the emergence of a dangerous new arms race as a result of China's and Russia's ongoing nuclear weapons build-ups, in reducing the risk of unintended escalation in outer space and elsewhere, and possibly in preventing dangerous rogue regimes and terrorists from acquiring potent weaponry. Our hope of finding such areas of potential cooperation, however, must not distract us from the main objective: meeting the challenges presented by their revisionist geopolitics and their increasing ability and willingness to employ the threat or use of force in pursuit of their objectives.

With our national leaders having largely stepped away from the challenges of such competition for a full generation after the end of the Cold War on the basis of faulty assumptions that the United States would no longer have to face "near-peer" challenges, we have now – unfortunately – returned to an ominous era of great power competition against authoritarian revisionists. It is the challenge of our times to develop and to maintain the strategies and postures that will enable us to meet these threats.

The need to meet these competitive challenges must be the central theme of U.S. foreign and national security policy: not our exclusive preoccupation, but certainly our *primary* concern, as well as the focus of continuing prioritization where – as will frequently be the case in this world of growing threats from "near-peers" and dangerous regional revanchists alike – resources and operational complexity do not permit us the self-indulgent luxury of thinking we can maximize outcomes along all policymaking axes at once. We must shed the habits we acquired in the strategically lazy years of the early post-Cold War environment, in which it seemed we could "have it all" and we felt we could avoid the distasteful and messy compromises required by complex equity-balancing and issue-prioritization. That world, alas, is gone.

It is thus our challenge today both to prioritize against the greatest threats *and* to ensure sustained application of effort in these regards on a "whole of government" or even "whole of system" basis. This will require wisdom, determination, and intestinal fortitude. We must not only approach these challenges with the steadfastness and rigor that they deserve, but must also build within our policy community the institutions and practices necessary to maintain that resolve over time. The United States must not only sustain sound policies backed by the resources and political support needed

for successful competitive strategy, but also ensure a continued supply of strategic acumen and creativity through the training and advancement of successive waves of talented young Americans to take the reins of this great national endeavor in years to come.

Mindful of the role of scientific and technological creativity and capabilities in a nation's competitive success in such an environment, moreover, our competitive strategy must reflect not only the traditional currencies of military power, diplomatic maneuver, and trade competitiveness, but also a sound and far-sighted approach to science and technology policy

and strategic competitiveness. We must find tools and approaches that build upon our strengths and are consistent with our values, and we neither can nor should attempt to acquire and use the range of ugly, coercion-based tools employed by the People's Republic of China in its competitive strategy vis-à-vis the United States. But compete we must, and fail we must not – and this will require a creativity and a steadfastness that Americans have not applied to great-power relationships for many years. We must learn this anew.




Democratic Values and the Rule of Law

The reason that we care who prevails in this new era of great power competition is not simply that one side is our own – though that is, of course, quite relevant. This great struggle is not merely about shallow tribal self-identity. It also revolves around the crucial fact that *our* side represents humane values such as the rights-based democratic accountability found in representative government, fidelity to the rule of law, and the role of rights such as political, religious, and other forms of free expression in protecting basic human liberties, promoting human thriving, and preventing oppression. The reason we care about great power competition is that these values *deserve* support from all thinking persons, and it is our duty and moral obligation to support them, and to help them survive and ultimately triumph over authoritarianism, autocracy, intolerance, and tyranny.

For this reason, maximizing fidelity to these principles must remain an important value in our policymaking. (Such fidelity is also an important source of U.S. strength and influence in global affairs – not to mention a potent leverage point in our struggles against authoritarianism

– but we prize it also for its own sake, not merely instrumentally.) We must often make decisions in the context of a range of cross-cutting pressures and conflicting equities, and our desire to advance these fundamental values does not absolve us of the



responsibilities of prudence and wisdom in making difficult choices. These values should, however, be part of the basic trajectory of our foreign policy.

This is not to say that we can always expect to succeed in every possible respect, nor that a degree of temporary compromise will not be necessary in order that these values prevail more broadly – such as, for instance, making some common cause with an unsavory partner in order to prevent the triumph of a greater villain presenting a catastrophic threat. Even in such circumstances, however, we must remember the values and principles that make “our side” the better

one, we must acknowledge that any such compromise and expediency is *not* fully faithful to these values, and we must seek to do ever better wherever we can, notwithstanding the complexity of the circumstances. We cannot and will not always achieve or maintain perfection, but we must retain moral self-awareness and set (and, as needed, re-set) ourselves on a path of ongoing recommitment to those values and principles, despite and precisely *because of* the challenges of a highly imperfect world.

IV

Allies and Partners

Principled conservatives regard partnerships and alliances with foreign states as both essential and instrumental. We view them as *essential* inasmuch as the United States needs to work with others if we are to protect and advance America’s own security and economic interests in an interconnected world – particularly a world characterized by revisionist great power competitors who seek to diminish, destabilize, and supplant us. Our country, great and noble as it is, does not stand astride the world as a global “hyperpower” in the ways that it did a generation ago at the end of the Cold War, and we cannot alone meet all the challenges we face. To succeed against these challenges, we must work with others – for indeed, we are likely to fail without them – and this requires careful attention to eliciting and maintaining cooperation.

Values and principles are also important here in that in the face of threatening autocracies, we share a natural commonality of interest with those countries that share our commitment to democratic governance and the rule-of-law – interests and values that would

be gravely imperiled if those autocracies have their way in the world. Such shared interests and values give us an especially strong foundation upon which to build in working with others to meet today’s competitive challenges.

Success in meeting these challenges requires United States leadership, and it needs, especially, the sort of leadership appropriate to leading diverse coalitions of partners whose cooperation will be difficult to sustain if we are not diplomatically deft, self-aware, and appropriately solicitous of their needs and concerns. We must also be clear and persuasively articulate in our vision of what the collective good requires, and willing to compromise, where needed, in the interests of cooperation without betraying our core interests and values. We must lead, and indeed others are unlikely to do so if we fall short.

But we also do not have the luxury of being bullishly monomaniacal or fixated upon tests of political or ideological purity – either of the Right or of the Left – and such attitudes would be deeply counterproductive. We have important work to do in leading a coalition of diverse friends, and this requires from us the moral courage of being both principled and flexible.

Yet partnerships and alliances are also instrumental, insofar as we should value them not for their own sake, but rather for what they contribute to our own security, to international peace and security, and to the common good. Our goal is a safer, more secure, and more prosperous United States – thriving within a global community that is itself as safe, secure, and prosperous as it can be – and such relationships, as with international institutions more generally, should be refused, adjusted, or abandoned to the extent that they do not promote these objectives.

As principled conservatives, we are strongly committed to the alliance relationships our country has built against its adversaries, and we will seek to preserve them for at least as long as such threats continue to face us. We are also committed to continuing to use security sector assistance and arms transfers to support the competitiveness and resilience of the U.S.

Defense Industrial Base and our country's broader National Security Innovation Base, and to shore up the partners with whom we share an interest in resisting the depredations of our competitors and adversaries.

Since we are not simply mercenaries but indeed have a compelling U.S. national interest in preserving and strengthening the integrity of the alliances that help safeguard against aggression by our competitors and adversaries, however, it is not necessary – and would be counterproductive – to demand that our allies pay the entirety of what it costs us to participate in collective security against our adversaries. Nonetheless, countries who purport to be allies but act as “free riders” upon American resolve in such collective endeavors risk corroding the alliance relationships upon which we both depend. Thus, it is also our policy to ensure appropriate burden-sharing, and that our allies demonstrate a genuine commitment to their own defense in partnership with us.

V Terrorism

International terrorists have already killed thousands of Americans in the 21st Century, and – despite the successes of our intelligence services, armed forces, and law enforcement agencies against organizations such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State – fanatics motivated by dangerous, violent, and viciously intolerant ideologies remain an ongoing threat to the United States and our allies. **As principled conservatives, we remain steadfastly determined to defeating all such groups that threaten us, as well as their confederates, associates, and allies.**

We seek to cut off such terrorists from their sources of funding, manpower, and weaponry and to deter and punish those states providing aid to them. We must employ all appropriate means of national power, as well as our alliance and partner relationships, to deny terrorists opportunities for success, to disrupt and break up their organizations, and to remove their operatives from the fight – whether as a result of criminal prosecution, through

detention as enemy combatants, or simply through being killed where they can be found, for taking up arms against our country. (We are perfectly comfortable with any or all of those methods, the choice between which should depend simply upon expediency under the prevailing circumstances, including such things as the availability of jurisdiction and admissible evidence, ongoing resources and authorities, and tactical opportunity.)

VI Rogue Regimes

In addition to our “peer” or “near-peer” state-level competitors, the United States faces significant threats from regional problem states: rogue regimes that seek to upend regional geopolitics to their advantage in ways dangerous to our friends and allies, threatening to our interests, and increasingly likely to imperil to regional and global peace and security. Compounding the threat, such regimes also seek to bolster their capacity to undertake disruptive and dangerous provocations through the acquisition of increasingly advanced and capable weaponry, including weapons of mass destruction and cyber weaponry, and sometimes also through the sponsorship or support of terrorism.

In today's world, the principal examples of this sort of rogue regime are clearly Iran and North Korea, but this type of threat has arisen before elsewhere and may well do so again. It is a key challenge for the United States to devise and to maintain effective policies and postures – in conjunction with our friends and allies – for dealing with such threats. We must slow or prevent rogue regimes' access to the tools they seek, and we must constrict their access to resources that could be used for destabilizing acts or postures. We must deter and (if needed) punish aggression and provocations. We must deprive them of regional or global allies and partners, and create incentives for them to constrain or eliminate threat capabilities they may already have acquired, including through negotiated arrangements to the degree that such regimes can be trusted to keep them. And we must, ultimately, be prepared to meet

and prevail against these rogues in the field should they lash out against us.

Because of the difficulty and dangers created as such rogues arise, we must also carefully monitor the international environment for the potential emergence of additional threats of this sort; the painful lessons of past collective timorousness in response to proliferation challenges makes clear that effective responses will be easier if we and our friends and allies can apply ourselves to forestalling such threats before they fully mature. This will require vision, as well as steadfast effort, courage, and diplomacy to overcome the collective action problems and frequent reticence of many partner states to take such emergent threats seriously before they have fully bloomed, but such “over-the-horizon” attentiveness and threat-mitigation work is essential.

VII

Our National Security Professionals

The U.S. armed forces, our Intelligence Community, and the various other organs that provide America's leaders with the personnel, tools, skills, and capabilities needed to preserve our security in a dangerous world are institutions that must be given the resources and authorities they require in order to fulfil these duties so critical to U.S. national security and to the advancement and promotion of our country's interests.

From our national borders to various more distant parts of the world, and across multiple domains – including the novel and high-technology arenas of cyberspace and outer space, as well in connection with the ongoing challenges of ensuring nuclear deterrence (including “extended deterrence” in support of U.S. allies) and of building and maintaining the resilient and responsive infrastructure necessary to sustain such deterrence – the United States faces formidable and growing threats. It is essential that the institutions upon which we rely for protection against these threats be fully fit for purpose, properly resourced, steadfastly supported by our political and policy communities, and altogether up to the job.

This does not mean that these institutions have an automatic and unquestionable claim upon just any funding or powers they may desire, of course. In an era of finite resources – and due to the need to prevent governmental overreach – it will remain a key challenge of wise statecraft to allocate resources, authorities, and policy attention to where they are most needed

in light of a clear-eyed understanding of the gravest threats and a stern attention to prioritization. Defense and security is the most important basic “good” that a government must provide to its people, however, and we must ensure that the institutions upon which our country relies for such protection are always able to meet the challenge.

VIII “Red versus Expert”

The world of foreign policy and national security challenges is a complicated and difficult one that requires our country to draw upon the full range of American talents. Our adversaries are skilled at their jobs, the friends and partners with whom we need to work in this world’s struggles represent complex societies of diverse and sometimes precariously balanced interests, and the policy challenges we face are complex and challenging in ways that require from us a great appreciation for detail and nuance.

Faced with long-term challenges from revisionist great power competitors, moreover, our policies must be sustainable over time in our own political system. We do not have the luxury of short-term solutions. This means that our policy answers must, wherever possible, have – and maintain – broad support across the political spectrum, in and through the bureaucratic and budgetary processes of government, and the U.S. legal, regulatory, and political environment. We must remember that America is necessarily in this for the long haul, and not merely for the political or ideological satisfaction of the moment.

As principled conservatives, we must always remember that making policy with these criteria in mind is not to

compromise on points of principle. It is, rather, the best way genuinely to be *faithful* to our principles in a challenging environment. Our objective is American security and prosperity, and one does not achieve and sustain such security and prosperity by mindlessly chasing the unattainable “perfect” at the cost of good and maintainable outcomes. We must keep our focus upon sound, principled, and sustainable policy choices for our country’s benefit, not upon mere posturing and virtue-signaling.

Our values and our principles indeed help form the ineradicable “commander’s intent” of statesmanship rooted in the American people’s electoral voice and our government’s accountability to it. But we must

also recognize that *expertise* has a critical role to play in informing policy and helping our country navigate dangerous terrain in furtherance of those values and principles. American society and our institutions of governance provide great reservoirs of talent and expertise that can be of enormous value to senior U.S. policymakers as they work to tackle the problems and meet the challenges of a dangerous world: cadres of patriotic, skilled experts who wish to serve our country to the best of their abilities, and whose knowledge and experience can inform and enrich decision-making in myriad ways. It is madness not to take advantage of these human resources.

This is not to advocate slavish subservience to technocracy. In a democracy the ultimate decisions necessarily rest with the sovereign people and those

whom they have elected to represent them, rather than with subject-matter experts, no matter how well schooled and well credentialed such experts may be. Since policymaking is an art of judgment, however, our leaders' choices must be as well informed as possible by what expertise has to say, even as the people's representatives quite appropriately reserve the right to exercise critical judgment thereupon.

If we reflexively neglect expertise, we are likely, in practice, to betray and to sacrifice the very values we wish to advance, by adopting approaches that will fail or cannot be sustained over time as we need them to be. If we try to follow Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in uncritically prizing "Red" over "Expert" in policymaking, we will likely reap a whirlwind of incompetence and failure. We owe our great Republic better than that.

IX

Trade

Though as principled conservatives we generally appreciate and prize the value of free markets – as well as the liberating frameworks of human liberty and agency that they represent – **we are also mindful that not all societies prize such freedom as we do, and that some of those societies continue to be willing to invest in market coercion as a tool of competitive advantage against our country.**

Today, the United States faces great threats from the competitive challenges created by the state-subsidized and market-distorting strategies adopted by the People's Republic of China as it seeks to restructure today's invaluable free and open international order around itself in ways deeply prejudicial to U.S. interests – not to mention to the integrity and survival of that order. Our commitment to free-market principles cannot ignore this

challenge, nor the anti-market manipulations involved in the Chinese Communist Party's revisionist geopolitics. These threats compel us to pursue a whole-of-society response in order to safeguard America's interests, including to preserve U.S. jobs and competitiveness in the face of such strategically manipulative distortions, and to protect international peace and security.

Even the great pioneering sage of free-market international trade Adam Smith, for example, freely conceded that “[t]he first duty of the sovereign [is] that of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies,” and that this could provide compelling reason for making exceptions to the general rule that free trade and free commerce conduce best to wealth and overall prosperity. As Smith recognized, sometimes circumstances arise in which “it will ... be advantageous to lay some burden upon foreign [industry], for the encouragement of domestic industry,” such as where that “particular sort of industry is necessary for the defence of the country.”²

As principled conservatives, we are wary of governmental market intervention and see collective good in the

unfettered operation of free, growth-conductive, job-creating markets – both domestically and internationally. Yet we are keenly aware of the ways in which systematic and deliberate market distortions by our strategic competitors can tilt the global playing field unfairly against hard-working Americans, and in which the offshoring of portions of the supply chain to un-trusted producers can create danger in both economic and security terms. We are willing to intervene in markets to the extent necessary to counteract such manipulations, forestall such dangers, and support U.S. competition and prosperity, particularly in connection with effective federal support for U.S. competitiveness and success in the emerging technology areas that will form the terrain upon which tomorrow’s geopolitical success (or failure) will occur.

X Immigration

Our nation has benefitted hugely throughout its history from the talents and energy of those who have come to these shores in order to escape oppression and to make a better life for themselves. Most Americans, in fact, descend from just such persons, and proudly so. Such talents and energy are also essential to our success in the competitive global environment we face today. Our country should continue to welcome law-abiding people who will contribute to our prosperity and future successes, including by providing them with appropriate paths to permanent residence or even the priceless gift of citizenship in the world’s oldest, most powerful, and most important democracy.

Yet for those not born into such citizenship, that prize is not a right but rather a privilege – and a great one. To those who do not wish us harm and desire merely to better themselves and their own lot, Americans

owe the basic responsibilities of humane treatment, but we do not owe others admission either to our territory or to our citizenry simply because they wish these things.

² Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, *supra*, at Book V, Chapter I, Part I, & Book VI, Chapter II, available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3300/3300-h/3300-h.htm>.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to suggest what to do about the millions who have already come to this country in ways that violate our laws. As principled conservatives, however, we recognize that it is both wise and important to America's future prosperity to give open-hearted welcome to the industrious, talented, and law-abiding who will genuinely contribute to our Republic and its prosperity.

Yet principled conservatives also understand the importance of fidelity to the rule of law – one of our country's core values – and insist upon the principle

that a free people *does* have the right to regulate passage across its national borders and the conditions of citizenship, that there is nothing immoral or unjust about doing so, and that a country that cannot control its borders is hardly a country at all. Wise leaders should welcome the deserving into the broad American family on appropriate American terms, preserve the rule of law, and prevent our country's security and prosperity from being undermined by loss of control over our borders, all at the same time. These are not incompatible objectives.

XI

Energy and Climate

The creative brilliance and enduring dynamism of American society depends upon the availability of energy resources. From a position of shocking dependency two generations ago, the United States today enjoys a remarkable degree of energy security notwithstanding the enduring interdependence of global energy markets – and we are on track to help increase our independence and prosperity even further through a combination of low-carbon-emission fossil fuel production (e.g., natural gas, of which the United States is now a major producer), the development of cutting-edge carbon-free nuclear energy production opportunities, and the expansion of renewable energy options.

We must continue to develop this diverse suite of energy opportunities, preserving its diversity and avoiding dependence upon any single type of source within a robust and resilience supply system. Despite their general support for free-market principles (see above) – and mindful of the ways in which our strategic competitors are working to support “national champion” industries against American interests – principled conservatives should not be afraid of prudent and

narrowly-targeted interventions, where needed, to support U.S. competitiveness, job growth, and prosperity in energy sectors crucial to our collective future.

Nor, as thoughtful conservatives always prudently awake to dangers in the world around us, should we be heedless of the need to cope with the challenges of climate change, for rising atmospheric carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas levels do indeed seem to cause

significant detrimental climate effects that could cascade through the complex systemic interconnectedness of human society. Fighting and managing such deleterious climate change is therefore an important public policy goal – though not necessarily one on the altar of which *all* other values should be sacrificed.

We should work to reduce climate-harming emissions, both through improved carbon-mitigation technologies and through the implementation of means through which climate externalities can be appropriately considered in free market decision-making. Nevertheless, especially in order to help ensure that climate policies are politically, economically, and socially sustainable, we should seek to do this in ways mindful of economic impact. We must

not surrender climate policy to those who would use climate change as an excuse to dismantle capitalist, industrial civilization. It is our task, instead, to help that civilization adapt, survive, reform itself, and thrive.

Mindful of the fact that it is unlikely that humans will quickly reduce carbon emissions to the point apparently required to stop harmful climate change, moreover, we should also not shrink from exploring ways to adapt to such change, or even novel methods by which it could perhaps be counteracted. The creativity and technological genius of humankind can and must be enlisted to find creative solutions to these problems, and we must not let ideological blinders of any sort stand in the way of effective and principled policymaking.

XII

Dialogue at Home

We live in a time in which the tone and tenor of American politics has reached a fever pitch of seemingly existential urgency. For many today, the purpose of U.S. politics and policymaking often seems to be to humiliate and annihilate one's opponents, and that any effort to engage or work with those who disagree is a form of apostasy similarly punishable by shame and destruction.

Yet principled conservatives remember that the purpose of U.S. politics and policymaking is actually to develop and implement policy choices that keep the United States safe and prosperous, and that advance the values and interests of the American people in a challenging world. Attitudes that approach politics as if it were an ugly, scorched-earth sort of conflict are not merely an embarrassment to the legacy of the Founders of our great Republic, they are also both dangerous and counterproductive.

The sorts of sound, sensible, hard-nosed foreign and national security policies that principled conservatives support need to be *sustained* over time if they are to allow America to meet the threats it faces in a dangerous world. To ensure this, we will sometimes need to make compromises with those who do not see things quite as we do, and we will *always* need to be willing to talk with, listen to, and learn from those who do not share our perspectives. Truly principled conservatives are passionate about our policies and our principles, but

also possess the moral courage to eschew the mere virtue-signaling that demands adherence to unviable or unsustainable approaches in the name of political purity. And they are willing, where appropriate, to negotiate with others in order to ensure that sound policies are set in place and survive over time.

Such an openness to constructive engagement in the pursuit of our principles is no betrayal of them: it is how principles are actually lived out in the real world, and it should be seen as a sign of wisdom and experience. This kind of approach, of course, is not always easy in an angrily moralistic time such as our

own. Nevertheless, principled conservatives do not come to the policy arena because it is easy. Rather, we seek to contribute here because these policy issues are important. And what is important must in turn be approached seriously – as a matter of choice-making in a complex environment of finite resources, inherently incomplete information, and fallible humanity, rather than as a mere pose, posture, or signal of tribal identity. This deep understanding of and commitment to the value of policy as *policy* distinguishes principled conservatives from radicals of any stripe.

XIII


Our Constitution and National Security

The genius of America's founding document has guided our nation through multiple existential crises, both internal and external. Principled conservatives believe that the separation of powers and system of checks and balances set forth in the Constitution and described so eloquently in the *Federalist Papers* not only give the United States a strategic advantage over other forms of government but also embody a particular wisdom about human nature, and about the strengths and the limits of governance itself.

It is no accident that our Republic both pioneered rights-based democracy and has survived and thrived for so long in the face of foreign threats and domestic turmoil alike. Humans being imperfect and non-perfectible creatures, we Americans have not always lived up to the values expressed in our constitutional system. Nevertheless, those values – and the constitutional mechanisms our Founders constructed around them – provide a compelling and undimmed model for the rest of humanity and have been a critical ingredient for the

United States' success in a challenging world for nearly two and a half centuries.

Since the first point at which a much earlier generation of Americans first demanded respect for their rights from what was then their Mother Country, political parties and alliances have come and gone, factions have arisen against each other and fallen away, a brutal civil war was fought to free Americans enslaved by other Americans, and how we live out our Founders' principles has



evolved in significant ways. Yet the American people's fundamental fidelity to the constitutional system has survived such trials, and the willingness of Americans to keep this faith – and to seek the common good through these mechanisms – has underpinned our country's strength and success in the world. We must not let domestic disagreements distract us from this truth, nor forget the importance of continuing that fidelity.

In the national security arena, our Founders gave the national legislature great responsibilities, among them the Senate's power of advice and consent on treaties and the approval of presidential nominations, Congress' power of the purse, the authority to raise armies and maintain navies, and the power to declare war and to craft such laws as may be required to meet the challenges and opportunities facing the United States abroad. As

our elected Chief Executive and Commander in Chief, the President enjoys a unique role and status in foreign affairs and national security, but to be effective and sustainable, America's national security strategy must honor the role our Constitution entrusts to the U.S. Congress as well. We are not naïve, and fully understand that agreement will never be possible on all issues across the political aisle or between the elected branches of the U.S. Government; it never has been. Yet America's national security strategy is at its most successful – and the United States at its strongest and most effective in the world – when we are able to work together as *Americans* against foreign threats and in support of our values. Principled conservatives recognize this, and work to support and preserve the framework through which the Constitution involves both political branches in these vital aspects of public policymaking.



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