

A CASE FOR A GLOBALLY ENGAGED, NATIONALLY SECURE AMERICA

Against the backdrop of a globalization that has many feeling more skeptical than optimistic, people are questioning existing notions of sovereignty. Nationalism is now being viewed as a rallying call for protectionism, rather than patriotism. This has fueled a false dichotomy between globalism and nationalism – particularly in the United States where leaders across politics and business along with every day citizens feel they must choose one path or the other. Given this context, how does a nation advance domestic interests while remaining globally engaged – and why is it vital in 2018?

On October 20, 2017, over 150 of Washington's top leaders met at the 6th Annual Meridian Global Leadership Summit to explore an underlying theme of present: "Advancing National Interests in a Globalized Society". Panelists from the public and private sectors, as well as the foreign diplomatic community, discussed the importance of international engagement and how the United States, specifically, can more effectively utilize its global leadership position to benefit the nation and its partners around the world. While the convened leaders voiced a diversity of perspectives, they agreed on several critical points:

MESSAGE ALIGNMENT KEY TO ACHIEVING PUBLIC SUPPORT.

American principles remain valued and sought after on a world stage. Through collaboration among sectors, the U.S. can and should continue to serve as a global leader, while concurrently elevating the security and economic prosperity of all Americans from the country's heartland to her coastlines. This posture sets the tone for collaboration and consensus building across nations in order to build a more secure and prosperous world. The challenge remains in channeling this messaging so it resonates with the large segment of the American population disadvantaged by economic stagnation, and not yet equating the benefits of international involvement with the realities of their lives. With the leadership of U.S. businesses, governments and civil society – all of which possess the resilience and ingenuity to adapt to evolving economic and societal landscapes – there are champions of global engagement that must articulate the benefits of international alliances to steer the country back on course.

TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC INDICATORS NO LONGER MEASURE UP.

Until recently, indicators like GDP and unemployment have measured the economic prosperity of a nation. But what about happiness? A new Gallup report found that people's happiness and perceived quality of life are linked with voting patterns during times of unrest. From Brexit and the Arab Spring to Donald Trump's Presidential Election, people's sense of thriving was at historic low points, despite 'healthier' economic metrics. In all scenarios, happiness influenced or was influenced by larger policy outcomes. The data demonstrates that happiness is just as important an indicator of a nation's stability as traditional economic metrics. The results also point to the critical need for leaders of democracies to examine how citizens feel before implementing policies that could destabilize morale, generate a retreat toward protectionism, or economically depress greater portions of the population – especially if happiness is overlooked.

NO SINGLE COUNTRY CAN FLOURISH ALONE.

Globalism and nationalism are loaded terms. The challenge today is how to balance them with proper perspective. How does a nation acknowledge and validate its interests in domestic issues without turning inward so much as to break global ties that have been historically important, and thereby inflict self-harm or give rise to populist appeal and nationalist policies? As recently observed by many heads of state around the world, when nationalism is viewed as protectionism it leads to isolating ideology and behaviors. Nations have begun to 'opt out' from a common set of rules that have historically governed the coexistence of robust domestic agendas and active international ones. Leaders that recognize the value of collective engagement have the potential to instead drive a nationalism narrative associated with patriotism – a pride for one's nation – that allows for building among citizens without building against others.

EVERYONE NEEDS INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND COMMON RULES.

Increasingly, international institutions are met with intense scrutiny and criticism. Yet in the face of global issues, people often turn to these same institutions for solutions. This pattern reinforces the need to work together for common solutions across mutual interests. While participating in global organizations raises questions around sovereignty, particularly at a time when nations are keen to protect borders and jobs, it also opens the opportunity for a new strategy that protects the integrity of a nation's sovereignty while envisioning vigorous leadership on the world stage. The foundation of U.S. leadership in the world is a strong military, both as a deterrent and to protect our friends and allies. We must have robust military alliances and intelligence sharing as well as a forward-looking diplomatic strategy that uses all of the tools in the bag – political, economic, and innovative public outreach programs. Being part of a collective helps smaller nations get a seat at the table and perhaps gain more sovereignty, while allowing larger nations like the U.S. to live by their values and share best practices with countries that aspire for more free and open societies.

NO NATION CAN DELEGATE ITS SECURITY.

As nations continue building partnerships on common interests, they also need to invest in domestic infrastructure, innovation and education that assure for economic, political and defense security. With the rise of nuclear threats and political upheavals around the world, national security strategy is taking center stage. Specifically, nations are prioritizing the identification of risks, assigning those risks probability, and leveraging resources to minimize the probability of risk. As leaders in the tech and intelligence communities uphold that the next big cyber threat is not if but when, nations around the world are preparing for the worst and hoping for the best. This preparation comes in the form of monitoring data, involving third party mediation, and – perhaps most importantly – international collaboration.

PRIVATE SECTOR WILL DRIVE EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL SECURITY ISSUES.

There has long been a deep-rooted skepticism and resentment between the tech community and government. Yet recently, new technology, new players and new approaches have disrupted nearly every industry around the world. As more business leaders leverage tech innovations to address security concerns across the Internet, the economy and even the global food system, governments are beginning to view the private sector more favorably – and as partners in achieving mutual interests. Moreover, the private sector's ability to incentivize best practices, particularly with cyber security, and to advance policies of allied governments, has demonstrated a critical need for the U.S. specifically to loosen regulations currently blocking the implementation of more creative solutions. Relaxing regulations for private-sector interventions that address public sector concerns would also help the U.S. keep pace with innovation and competition around the world.

THE UNITED STATES IS UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO LEAD IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY.

The economic leadership of the U.S. is a major concern among both Americans and foreigners alike. If America is not leading the charge, the rest of the world will bolster nationalism as the U.S. steps back as a global economic leader – and nations such as China will fill the void and determine the rules for the future global economy. From pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership to the possible withdrawal from the North American Free Trade Agreement, the U.S. is retreating from long-standing trade agreements that have served as the lynchpin of our regional relationships. In the case of NAFTA, economic competitiveness of all three nations – the United States, Canada and Mexico – has been contingent upon what their people, companies and nations produce together. Within specific trade contexts, collaboration is preferable to direct competition. U.S. leadership in the global economy is dependent on all countries remaining active on the international sphere – America included.