

American Academy of Diplomacy

**Remarks by Secretary James A. Baker III on Acceptance of the
2018 Walter and Leonore Annenberg Award**

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Members of the Academy, Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. Now, in my 89th year, I'm trying to cut back on my schedule, so I hope you will understand why I am doing this via video. In a moment, I want to say a few words about American leadership on the world stage. But first, let me thank the American Academy of Diplomacy for this award, named after two remarkable Americans, both of whom I admired and considered friends. Walter and Leonore Annenberg exemplified the generous and enduring American nature that has helped make our nation strong and resilient. Of course, tonight would not have been possible for me had I not worked for President George H.W. Bush, who history will remember, I am sure, as our nation's very best one term president and one of the best presidents of all time. No president understood diplomacy and foreign affairs any better than President Bush. As the first US ambassador to China, director of the CIA, and vice president, his resume immaculately prepared him for the job. By the time he assumed the Oval Office, he understood both the big picture as well as the subtle nuance of what became one of the most dramatic four years in world history as the Cold War ended with a whimper rather than with a bang. Along the way, he assembled a national security team that worked together on the delicate issues of the day, rather than squabbling with one another like so many others have. Brent Scowcroft, Dick Cheney and I may have had occasional differences, and we did, but we usually resolved them without having to ask our boss to referee.

We all sang from the same hymnal, which meant that our allies and our adversaries clearly understood US policy and couldn't twist differences to their own advantage. There's never been a doubt in my mind that a main reason for any success I had as Secretary of State was because I enjoyed a seamless relationship with my president, a friend of 60 years and one whose political campaigns I managed. And so President

Bush deserves much of the credit for tonight's award. Ladies and gentlemen, to judge by what we see in the media, the era of American international leadership is nearing an end. There is talk of a new American isolationism and indeed the collapse of the liberal international order. But I'm not so sure. Perhaps my age gives me some perspective. I can remember that long struggle of the Cold War, when peace between the United States and the Soviet Union precariously rested on the promise of mutually assured destruction. Trust me, the good old days were nothing of the kind. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the world experienced a period some has defined as America's unipolar moment, one marked by relative stability. As democracy spread across the globe and international trade flourished. Today, however, we appear to have entered a new period of marked international instability. Several trends are driving this phenomenon. The rise of China has fundamentally, fundamentally altered the global balance of economic and increasingly military power.

Russia has returned decisively to the world stage, flexing its muscle in Ukraine, in Syria and elsewhere. Europe is beset with issues of internal governance, including immigration policy, the future of the euro, Brexit and backsliding on democratic norms in some Eastern European countries. In the in the Middle East, events are being driven by a burgeoning competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia for influence in the Persian Gulf and beyond. And here in the United States, partisan wrangling has reached new and crippling heights of rancor. Let me make one vital point at the outset. The United States cannot retreat from the world stage. We have too much at stake. We did not create the current system of military alliances and trade agreements from some theoretical commitment to multilateralism. We acted to avoid another devastating Great Depression and another catastrophic world war among the great powers. And we were successful because our interest in peace and prosperity converged with those of partners in Western Europe, in Asia and elsewhere. The United States and the world have benefited mightily from this historic endeavor. Any US exit from this system would lead to greater economic and strategic instability. We would see a rise in conflict as regional powers jostle for influence in the wake of US withdrawal, and we would experience a surge in beggar thy neighbor's policies as the rules based liberal trade and investment regime would erode.

Either of those unfortunate developments would directly undermine the safety and the well-being of Americans. Isolationism, therefore, is simply not an option for our long-

term global security and wellbeing. But a recalibration of our foreign policy is certainly in order. As Walter Lippmann wrote in 1943, foreign policy consists in bringing into balance with a comfortable surplus of power in reserve, the nation's commitments and the nation's power. As we attempt to recalibrate US foreign policy, we should consider a few rules of thumb for effective diplomacy. First, Teddy Roosevelt was right. We should generally speak softly and carry a big stick. There is a time and a place for tough public talk, even with allies. But much of the important work of diplomacy is best done in private. The object is not to score public debating points. It is to secure good arrangements advantageous to the United States. Second, we must be careful in picking our fights. Otherwise, any US administration risks squandering its international influence and domestic political capital. Third, we should always remember the big picture. It is sometimes better to yield on small issues if it increases the odds of success in more important ones. Negotiations do not take place in isolation. They occur in a broader context. And lastly, we should recall that not all negotiations are zero sum. Indeed, the most successful agreements are based upon mutual advantage. As you might imagine, I've been called a lot of things during my many years in the public eye,

some good and some bad. But woolly-headed idealist is not one of them. I am a staunch internationalist for a very simple reason. I believe that US engagement in the international arena is vital to the security, the prosperity and the liberty of the American people. There is nothing wrong with national self-interest. Indeed, its promotion is the sin of qua none of effective foreign policy. But that self-interest should be enlightened. It should look beyond the immediate narrow advantage in this or that negotiation. Let me finish these remarks on a note of optimism. I realize that today this is unfashionable, but I remain firmly upbeat about the future of the world and of the United States of America. Surely problems abound, but we should remember that by most important criteria, we are living in a golden age for humanity. Extreme global poverty has declined precipitously. People live longer. Far fewer of their children die in infancy. The United States may not possess the unrivaled power that it did say in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, but it remains, by a substantial margin, the most powerful country in the world. And we must recalibrate our use of that power to reflect new realities. As Abraham Lincoln once said, as our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. His wise admonition is as true today as it was when he expressed it more than 150 years ago. Thank you all very much.