

**SESSION 5.**

**SECURITY SYSTEMS AND COMPETITION: GLOBAL POLITICS**

**THE TRANSCRIBED SPEECH OF DANIEL FRIED AT THE  
CONFERENCE, SESSION 5**

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Thank you very much. Thank you for the opportunity, and hello to Van Krikorian, I don't see you but I assume you're there.

It is a pleasure to see you all. I was asked to speak about American foreign policy in general, but specifically about Russia and then Armenia. That is a more difficult task because the foreign policy of President Trump requires explanation, especially to audiences that find it new or difficult to understand. Candidate Trump and then President Trump ran the foreign policy part of his campaign under the slogan "America First." That slogan is both innocuous on one level. All put their country first on some level. The President of Armenia puts Armenia first, as well he should, and American presidents put America first, as well they should.

The question is how do we define our respective national interests? America First is a loaded phrase, of course, because it was used by America's isolationists in the late 1930s as they argued against American involvement in Europe. Under the influence of the isolationists, who used the slogan "America First," my country was absent from Europe during the 1930s, a period in which Hitler and Stalin created grave and lasting damage to us all. So "America First" it is a loaded phrase.

To my Armenian friends, I would say also that President Trump also recalls another American foreign policy tradition, an older one which understandably has been forgotten in Europe, a tradition from the time of Andrew Jackson in the early 19th century. The Jacksonian tradition, as it has developed in the United States, is an inward-looking tradition based on populism, avoidance of anything European, and nationalism. Basically, the

Jacksonian tradition meant, more or less, America pushing aside everything in its path as we expanded our nation on the North American continent. That tradition has continued, mostly obscured and less influential, and sometimes more influential, as is the case now. President Trump's foreign policy approach also recalls a kind of Darwinian, narrow nation-first approach.

Happily, there has been some evolution. President Trump in his Warsaw speech in July of this year spoke in a different way: he spoke about the West and America as a leader of the West; he spoke of an alliance of Western nations rooted in common values, and among those values those are the rule of law, and freedom of the press and freedom of expression. In that context, President Trump reaffirmed American support of NATO in general, and NATO's Article 5 mutual defense commitment in particular. In his UN address last week, President Trump tried to synthesize the two strains of America First and the Warsaw Speech, which was a defense of the Western Alliance. At the UN, he talked about America believing in its national sovereignty and called on sovereign nations to unite together to fight common problems. Now that is not the way I would express America's role in the world. But my job here is to advocate for my vision of American foreign policy; it is rather to try to explain the current American administration. Again, that Trump's UN speech is not how I would express it, but even that speech gives us something to work with: it provides the basis for an American foreign policy which can include the defense of freedom generally in the world and defense of the countries under pressure from larger rapacious neighbors.

Of course, there are a number of questions about the Trump administration foreign policy which I can't answer. I cannot, for example, explain how far the Trump Administration would extend the concept of national sovereignty. Is national sovereignty, for example, an ultimate rationale for national action? President Trump indeed suggested at the UN that national sovereignty is an absolute. But in that same speech, he attacked Venezuela for its internal repression of its own people, suggesting that Venezuelan sovereignty did not necessarily provide an excuse for a

violation of human rights and democratic norms. That also means President Trump seemed to elevate democracy, and human rights as a standard to which otherwise sovereign nations could be held and for which they are accountable. Now I'm not able to explain to you the logical contradictions from Trump's speech last week except to suggest that these tensions will persist in American foreign policy.

I've spoken at the level of strategy and if you permit me, ideology. In practice, the Trump administration's foreign policy toward Europe and toward Russia has more continuity and less change than the Trump administration itself would probably admit. We have continued NATO deployment of forces to the Baltic States and American forces to Poland, in response to Russian aggression against Ukraine and Russian pressure against its neighbors. This is a continuation and reaffirmation of Barack Obama's policy, which itself reversed 30 years of American military drawdown in Europe. The Trump administration also has continued support for the sanctions against Russia. It has continued to enforce those sanctions. The Congress has locked in those sanctions, putting into law the Obama Administration's Executive orders which established the Russia sanctions program for the United States. The Trump administration signed that law.

There's also continuity in areas of personal. The Senior Director for Europe and Eurasia at the National Security Council, Fiona Hill, is a renowned Russia specialist, and is not the sort of person who would be associated with a weak or accommodations policy to Russia; she is realistic and well informed about Putin. Wess Mitchell, last night confirmed as Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, has devoted his professional life to issues of Central Europe, the Visegrad countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia), the Baltic countries; and Wess appears intensely interested in what he has called the countries in between the EU and Russia on the other, including Armenia. Fiona Hill and Wes Mitchell are the last people who should be put into office if the Trump Administration were intending to do some kind of secret deal with Russia over the heads of the Ukrainians or the people in the South Caucasus or the Baltics.

So again, there is continuity in the Trump Administration's actual approach on the ground, judging by senior personnel appointments. I don't know how the Trump Administration will approach relations with Turkey judging by President Trump's positive characterizations of President Erdogan. Trump may be attempting to reach out to Erdogan just as President Bush did in his time and President Obama did in his time. As someone who worked on U.S.-Turkish relations during the Bush administration, I have to tell you that we were disappointed, to say the least, by the results of our effort to work with Turkey. Initially, we had high hopes for relations with the AKP party government. I personally was impressed with Prime Minister Davutoglu's 'Zero Problems with its Neighbors' approach to Turkey's immediate region. In particular, I had hoped (and still hope) that such a positive approach would extend to Turkish-Armenian relations. At the end of the Bush and beginning of the Obama Administration, I worked on the Turkish Armenian reconciliation talks, which first led to initialing and then the signature of an agreement, but not to ratification. I'm sorry that the Turks and Armenians weren't able to bring this process to a conclusion, and I'm sorry that Turkey, as the stronger power, did not show more leadership in achieving a successful conclusion. Success in relations with Armenia would have suited Turkey's Zero Problems with its Neighbors well; I think it would have served everyone's interests: the interests of Turkey, the interests of Armenia, the interests of the South Caucasus generally, and of Europe. I also think a Turkish-American Reconciliation agreement would have served American interests as well.

I'm not sure about Russia's interests in the South Caucasus region. With respect to the South Caucasus, Vice President Pence led a visit to Tbilisi after a trip to Tallinn. His speech was strong, and well-received in Tbilisi. The Vice President spoke of American support of the sovereignty and European future of all the countries of the South Caucasus, and the countries that lie between the EU and Russia.

That leads me to Armenia. There are two tracks in American policy toward Armenia, beyond the obvious principles that we support Armenian

independence, sovereignty, and its internal reforms and prosperity at home. There is the track of Armenian regional relations. I have spoken of Turkish-Armenian relations, and there are other regional issues with which we are occupied, such as Nagorno Karabakh. The other aspect of US-Armenian relations depends on an answer to the question, what does Armenia want for itself and where does it see itself?

I don't have an answer for those questions. Does Armenia see itself as ultimately belonging to a wider Europe, ultimately within the European Union, or in some close association with European Union? Or does Armenia see itself as a bridge between Russia and Europe, a place in between Europe and Russia, Europe and Eurasia? I can't answer this, nor is it my place to demand an answer. My country is focused on issues big to us, including US-Russian relations, North Korea, Iran, perhaps Syria and the challenge of terrorism. The time will come when we turn our attention in a systematic way to the South Caucasus. Georgia says it wants to draw closer to Europe. Much Georgia's future will depend on Georgia's own internal reforms. I suppose the question for Armenia is how do you see yourselves in 10 years and what can the US do to help.

Now I've covered a lot of ground, and I suppose I've generated enough material for questions which I am happy to answer. Let me also say that I've enjoyed my work with Armenia and I look forward to my next trip to Yerevan. I'm sorry I can't be with you this time. But it was a pleasure to accept Van Krikorian's invitation to speak to you this way. I wish you luck, and again, I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.