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Trump and the crumbling of the US-led world order
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(MUSIC)

PITA: Hello. And welcome to Intersections. Part of the Brookings Podcast Network. I'm your host, Adrianna Pita.

Following the bloody first half of the 20th Century, the international structures and systems that made up the liberal world order were established to maintain the general peace, with the idea that the expansion of free trade and democracy would put an end to the Great Power Competitions which precipitated two massively destructive world wars.

Today, we are going to hear from two authors and Brookings experts with deep backgrounds in grand strategy and U.S. foreign policy, Robert Kagan and Thomas Wright.

Associate Fellow, Will Moreland, will guest host as they discuss how the success of the liberal world order has engendered its own fragility, and opened a window for President Trump's longstanding isolationist world view to find a purchase with a receptive audience.

Now, over to Will.

MORELAND: Hello. I'm Will Moreland, Associate Fellow of Brookings Project on International Order and Strategy.

I'm here today with two colleagues and mentors, Robert Kagan, Senior Fellow with the Project on International Order and Strategy, and author of, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World*, it will release in September.

And Tom Wright, also a Senior Fellow, International Order and Strategy, Director of the Center on the United States and Europe here at Brookings, and author of, *All Measures Short of War*, which will come out in paperback this September.

Bob and Tom, thank you for joining for this discussion on America's global role, and the impact of the Trump administration on the U.S. grand strategy.

WRIGHT: Thanks. It's good to be here.

KAGAN: Thank you.

MORELAND: So, obviously the President's foreign policy continues to make headlines on issues spanning the globe, from the June Singapore Summit with Kim Jong-un, to July's NATO Summit and the meeting with Vladimir Putin. There is a lot to talk about the administration making a lot of changes.

You've both examined multiple aspects of the administration. Tom, you delved into Trump's worldview in your early days of his candidacy, and have been a leading author on that since then.

And Bob, you've written increasingly in *The POST* and other places about what the Trump administration's changing role means for America's power.

So, before we dive into the President though, let's ground ourselves in the way we've been, so we can look where we are going.

Bob, in your forthcoming book, *The Jungle Grows Back*, you explore how following World War II the United States carved a garden of liberal world order out of the jungle of global politics. What did that war entail, and how did it serve American interest to pursue it?

KAGAN: Yeah. Well let me hasten to say that it was a garden only by comparison with the rest of history. Obviously it was not a garden, a lot of horrible things happened over the past 70 years. But in order to talk about what the founders of this order created, people like Dean Acheson, and Harry Truman, and Franklin Roosevelt, and many others, it's important to understand what it was they were trying to prevent.

Because that was really the motive behind creating this order. I think we sometimes lose sight of that. They just live through two absolutely catastrophic world wars, the most destructive wars in history, and they looked at the causes of those wars and sought to remove the conditions that in their view, and in most people's view had made those wars possible.

One, was obviously the strategic competition in Europe between Germany and France, Germany and Russia and other countries, a sort of multi-polar competition which had led to increasing armed races. And a similar kind of competition in Asia between Japan and China, where Japan was an aggressor throughout most of that period. That was one element.

They also looked at the economic situation leading up to World War II which they saw as having been badly damaged by protectionism on the part of all countries, including the United States, but also Europe, each country and each great power sort of moving off into its own isolated economics sphere.

And of course they looked at the rise of tyrannies, like Mussolini's Fascist Movement, Hitler, Stalin, and they thought that the world would be a more peaceful place if it were more

democratic. So that was the lessons learned from the bloody first half of the 20th Century.

So, the order, what we call the liberal order that they set up was designed to ameliorate all those conditions to create a new set of conditions that would be more peaceful. An open economic order where countries traded freely and protectionism was reduced.

A more democratic world where the countries, at least in Western Europe and Japan would be democratic and therefore less threatening to the general peace.

And finally, a great power situation where really those conflicts between Germany and France, and Germany and other countries of Europe on the one hand, and the conflict between Japan and China on the other, could basically be put to rest. And they did so by implanting American forces in those two regions to keep the peace.

So, those three elements make up what we today call the liberal world order. This is not an idealistic effort, it was a very practical effort to prevent a return to the catastrophes of the first half of the 20th Century.

MORELAND: Catastrophes that would inherently draw the United States in, is it in U.S. interest to prevent these catastrophes?

KAGAN: That's right. Normal countries have relatively narrow views of what their interests are. America had a narrow view of its interests, certainly, before World War I and then in the period between the two world wars.

The founders of the new order and the American people, in general, decided that they've had too narrow a view of what their interests were, precisely because, as you say, two world wars which occurred thousands of miles away from the United States, nevertheless wound up drawing the United States in for a variety of reasons, including, of course Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

So they didn't believe, people like Franklin Roosevelt and Acheson didn't believe it was going to be possible for the United States to remain aloof from these kinds of conflicts. Therefore, it had to define its interest broadly enough to take responsibility for preventing those conflicts.

MORELAND: And coming at the tail end of World War II, the strategy was put in place at the onset of the Cold War, and it survived for 45 years that conflict, but then it continued on,

after the Berlin Wall fell, after Soviet Union collapsed. Was it a case of the job was done and the strategic shift was necessary, or was there something else driving U.S. policy?

KAGAN: It's a common misconception really that the foreign policy that I've been describing of creating this kind of world order was a response to the Soviet Union in the Cold War, but it actually preceded the arrival of the Soviet Union as an adversary.

I mean, most American officials, from Roosevelt to Acheson, during World War II thought that the Soviet Union would continue to be an ally as it was during World War II. They created this order, not aimed at any particular threat, not aimed at the Soviet Union, and in fact they were thinking more about the return of the threat of Japan and Germany than they were about the Soviet Union.

But almost immediately after World War II of course, and after they'd begun to lay the groundwork for this order, the confrontation with the Soviet Union did arise, and it became wrapped up with Cold War.

When the Cold War ended, I think that the early administrations, from the first Bush administration, George H. W. Bush, to the Clinton administration, the second Bush administration under George W. Bush, understood in a way that this world order was not created just to respond to the Soviet Union, but to maintain the general peace, and preserve America's interests and values in the international system.

And so, for instance, when Saddam Hussein's Iraq invaded Kuwait, people like Brent Scowcroft and George H. W. Bush saw this as something that could undermine this order in a way that would ultimately come back to haunt the United States, and therefore they acted to push Saddam Hussein back out.

And I think if you looked at other areas of the world order including the expansion of NATO, including tightening ties with Asian allies, those early Presidents understood that the world order was not created just in response to the Soviet Union, but to maintain a general peace.

MORELAND: And Tom, in this moment after the end of the Cold War, in the 1990s, the early even 2000s, there did seem to be a transformative period based on that U.S. strategy. You've written in *All Measure Short of War*, for instance, that the most powerful foreign policy

instrument of the 1990s, 2000s was not a weapon or a dogmatic alliance, but an idea that States would converge toward becoming more responsible stakeholders, was the term, in a U.S.-led system. What happened to that vision?

WRIGHT: Yeah. But I think, just before I get into that, I mean, you know, the '90s we look back on as a sort of really pleasant time of progress, but it didn't really fell that at, at the time. It felt sort of chaotic.

I started studying in grad school just around the time of the cusp of the war, and everyone said, that's an amazing time to be doing this, because it has never been so chaotic, and things have never been so likely to fall part, you know. And now that period seems very benign by comparison.

So, I wouldn't overdo the description of the '90s, and even 2000s as without any problems. And, you know, if you go back and read the history of that period, Bill Clinton was giving these speeches, and warning against isolationism, he was really worried about constraints, as Bob has written, constrained about the use of force.

There was as many instances of not actually projected powers, or was projecting power, probably look back on the Balkans of the tail end of a very bloody period for the U.S., you know, didn't act all that early, which convinced other people inside the administration that they should do so in future.

But all of that said, I mean, I think there was a sort of an expectation that history was headed in a certain direction. And it's not necessarily the Frank Fukuyama, thesis that everyone was just being sort of misrepresented, and his argument was a bit more nuanced, but it's been represented into the same democracies inevitable everywhere.

I don't think that was the idea, but I think there was a sense that Great Power Competition was a thing of the past, and that countries basically all sort of agreed to their common interests, and that all things are territorial disputes, were meeting this.

And, you know, in reality I think it was largely because the U.S. was much more powerful than everyone else. It wasn't that other great powers had no ambitions, it was just they acquiesced in the reality of the moment. And as the penny dropped as to exactly what this was, which I think they basically understood from the outset, and they became more powerful,

they began to push back.

But I do thing that in the U.S. and in Europe, there was a sense that progress was inevitable. And even up to the Obama administration that sense prevailed in certain quarters and now instead of convergence we've seen significant divergence, and we've seen really becoming a part of the visions going very different directions.

MORELAND: So, the geopolitical accomplishment is it always set to return once the power differential shrank? Were there certain policies though, the United States pursued, whether it's expansion of NATO, or actions in the Middle East that hasten that return, or it could have been done differently to put us on a different route?

WRIGHT: No. I mean, my view is basically the main reason why we are where we are is because Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping believe that if the liberal international order succeeds globally, it's light side for authentication regimes in their countries. Right?

That the liberal international order, if it's successful and prosperous internationally, that's where it's not safe for authentication rule. And so they think of that independently of decisions that are made in Washington, Berlin and London. I mean, obviously those decisions matter but, you know, it's freedom of the press, if you think about China 2012 it was *The New York Times* that exposed corruption in the Chinese Politburo that massively destabilizing.

That wasn't decided upon by President Barack Obama, right, that just happened because of the free press, the internet, social media, companies, activities, NGOs, what Putin is always going on about, these are part of who we are.

And I think the twist is that they're not wrong. Right? They're not wrong about their analysis, which is that it does pose, I think, an existential threat ultimately to totalitarianism.

But the flip side is that there's basically nothing we can do to accommodate them that would be worth the price. Because anything we would do to address that would involve changing our system to such an extent that it would be something much worse.

So, it doesn't main saying the Russians, oh, we don't really care about democracy in Russia. It means repressing democracy in the Ukraine, repressing democracy in Hungary and Poland, and elsewhere, buying into their efforts to repress things external to their borders.

And so I think that essentially this is a tragic inevitability. I mean, both sides are correct

in their perceptions, right, which is the Russians and Chinese are pushing back because they worry that if they don't push back it will weaken authoritarianism.

I see that as good thing, obviously they see that as a bad thing. We are right in that we believe that it's worth pushing back on that, and not compromising, and not accommodating their insecurities, but they are meddling around, and there are insecurities. But they are meddling around in our politics as a result, and this is driven, I think, inherently by insecurities, but that doesn't make it any better. Right? That actually makes it worse.

And so I think NATO expansion is a red herring, I think Bob has spoken about this before, that objectively, you know, the military threat to Russia and Europe has declined massively. I mean, defense spending, troops, everything has been down. But I think what did matter was expansion of the EU, the expansion of democracy, human rights, market economies throughout Europe, and that he believed that that would lead to actions inside of Russia.

And again, I don't think that's something we could have, or should have compromised on. I mean, the idea that we would say to the Poles that they can't have democracy in a market economy because it could make Vladimir Putin insecure. I think sounds absurd, you know, as a proposition.

So, I think we are on the road run, and we are going to compete about these different visions for some time.

MORELAND: Bob, can I ask you about a point that Tom was making just, on the incompatibility of the systems, more market-based democracy system versus a more authoritarian one, and how pushing back on one is at the expense of the other.

It reminded me of a (inaudible) used a couple times, and Franklin Roosevelt going into World War II, about the idea that if we let authoritarianism run amuck throughout the rest of the world, America is always like a prisoner behind bars. For many people, I think the issue of U.S. interest abroad seem remote. These places seem far away. How do they impact American lives?

If we were not to have that more forward-leaning policy throughout the world, do you think there would be ramifications that include changing our way of life here at home?

KAGAN: First of all that was certainly the fear of people like Dean Acheson, and George

Cannon, and others, both during and just after World War II, that in a world that was increasingly authoritarian and militarized, in order to defend ourselves, and compete successfully, the United States would have to gear its economy, you know, in a sort of government-directed way, even more than it is, to channel resources toward military activities that they worry that domestic freedoms would be endangered in order to compete with that world.

So, that was a major concern. There's a fundamental understanding about the state of human existence actually that I think we have come to lack in a way that the great success of the liberal world order has also been its undoing.

And what I mean by that is, I think most Americans take for granted that democracy -- not just Americans but Europeans too -- that democracy is a normal condition, and this is where I think Fukuyama was expressing a common view. But he did express it very clearly and articulately, but it's a view of humanity and history as having a direction, that there is a natural progression from authoritarianism to democracy, democracy is the higher level, democracy is where we are headed, all things being equal.

History suggests that that's absolutely not the case, that democracy is in fact the rarest form of government, if you look at the look at the whole expanse of human history, and even the idea that we've been steadily progressing toward democracy is a kind of delusion that we've created, partly because we've been living in a world where democracy was so prevalent.

But that has to do with the fact that the world order that we set up, made it possible for democracy to be prevalent. If you were sitting in the world as were, obviously, in 1939, no one thought democracy was the future. In fact, everyone thought democracy was on its way out.

So, the presumption that democracy is sort of what things would be if humans were left to their own devices is a mistake. What that means is we are at a constant struggle between competing elements of human nature.

Again, I think one of the errors of the Fukuyama, and maybe the Hegelian thesis that he was drawing on, was this idea that, you know, at the end of the day human beings will choose freedom and a democratic form of government that provides them individual recognition, et cetera.

Well, that is a human impulse, but there are other human impulses. Human beings also want strong leadership, they want protection, they sometimes prefer security over freedom. And so, there is always going to be a struggle between these tendencies which lead to the strengthening of authoritarianism in human society, versus democracy.

And I think what we have to understand, again looking at history, is that democracy has a harder row to hoe. It's going to be harder to preserve democracy.

The thesis of my book, the metaphor I use about the jungle growing back, is that we created a very democratic world but it's not natural, and nature will always be pressing against it to take it back, the vines in the weeds will always be growing and seeking to sort of reclaim the land.

And so, in fact, in order to preserve our democratic way of life, it's going to be a constant struggle to support democracy both here and around the world.

MORELAND: And at this exact moment of rising tensions between democratic states and non-democratic states, it seems the person selected to oversee the garden is President Trump.

And, Tom you've written extensively on his worldview, you've described him as a man who is skeptical of military alliances, who is skeptical on trade deals, who is not skeptical on authoritarian strongmen, and that's been a long-standing series of views that he's held. Is he fundamentally at odds with the liberal world order that we've been describing?

WRIGHT: Yeah. I mean, he is I think. He doesn't speak in the same lexicon as people who do foreign policy do, right. So, he isn't talking about theories of world politics, or hegemony or, you know, the liberal order, or anything like that.

But he's obviously got a very different viewpoint. I mean, the earliest we can tell is, you know, his breakout year was 1987, he thought about running for President in 1988. He wrote letters, full-page letters in *The New York Times, The Washington Post*, he did interviews on Oprah, he did all of these things.

And there's virtually nothing that he really said about the world before then. He made a couple of comments about Iran, around the time of the Iran Hostage Crisis, but most of the record sort of starts then.

And the message is really consistent. You know, as we've talked about before, you know, it's exactly what you said, is primarily hostility to alliances, right. It's also hostility to trade, and then there's sort of authoritarian thing, and particularly with regard to Russia.

This is at the height of Regan administration, obviously, you know, this wasn't a Democratic administration, or it wasn't during the Obama administration. So, it's pretty deeply rooted.

I mean, my view is that as he looks at the world, and this is maybe a benign explanation, he mainly sees threats to the U.S. from allies and partners, not from adversaries. Right? So, he thinks that if the U.S. is providing a security commitment that's a really bad deal, and he thinks that all trading relationship, post-World War II are bad deals because there's trade deficits.

Because we think of the U.S. as model under -- the dollar as the key currency, the U.S. is the global consumer, and he has a problem with trade deficits, which doesn't really make any economic sense because it's not necessarily negative. But he does.

And he doesn't care about geopolitics. I mean, he doesn't care about Eastern Europe, he doesn't care about the South China Sea, he sees all about, as sort of irrelevant to other people's business.

So, as far as he looks at it, he's genuinely confused, I think, from quite early on about why people are more upset about these commitments that the U.S. entered into, and he spent most of his adult life trying to undo them. You know, when he talked about it.

Whenever he talks about politics he really comes back to these themes, throughout the last three decades. Like, he never talks about health care, or tax, or fiscal policy, or monetary policy, he talks about -- it's basically a foreign policy candidate and President in terms of what drives him.

And, you know, he didn't sort of respond to the American people. It was just that, he was saying this stuff all the time, and 2016 it happened to connect in a way that it didn't in 1988 or 1992, or whenever he thought about running before.

So, you know, we have this guy who, and I agree with what Bob has said and written, that there are structural factors why this is vulnerable, this international order. But I would just add that a lot of it is then him. History throws up these unique figures from time to time and,

you know, we wouldn't be talking about a trade war with the EU, or pulling out of NATO if Ted Cruz was President, you know, or even if Bernie Sanders was President.

I mean, they may have all sorts of problems, about doing less in the world, they may want to pull back, but I think there's an additional factor involved with Trump. And my only point that I was trying to continuously make, is that the President is always the most significant person in their own administration, and this is even more true I think with Trump.

And he's a very significant figure. He has very strong opinions, they're not particularly sophisticated or well developed or thought through, but they are there, and all the evidence we have both publicly and any private conversations people have with the administration I think basically backs this up. He doesn't always get his way, but he's always making the case.

MORELAND: There's an interesting turn of phrase, and describing as foreign policy candidate, because there's that old D.C. adage that candidates don't run on foreign policy, they get elected on domestic issues.

So, do either of you think that we should take that as a sign about the willingness of the American people to play the larger role that the United States has played in supporting the international order? Do we think that the United States -- a portion of the American public perhaps -- is ready for the United States to become more of a normal Nation?

WRIGHT: Just one very short thing on that. I mean, he basically mastered diffusion of domestic and foreign, right. He had a singular message that was like, Europe domestic problems that are a result of these foreign commitments. Right? So, he was able, very much to succeed in that. And he also breached norms.

There's all sorts of constituencies for all sorts of crazy ideas, but no politician would dream of trying to tap into them. No one ever thought, I'm going to start talking about being in favor of Russian, or authoritarianism, or pulling out of NATO. And that partly because they thought there was no market in it, and partly because they just thought it was absurd.

He decided to just go to all those places, and he revealed that there was a market, an untapped market for positions that we thought were long dead and gone. And that I think will be his lasting legacy.

I mean, any candidate in the future has to think, this is potentially some place I can mine

for support. And I don't think anyone thought that before, I mean, maybe (Inaudible) Cannon, but no one certainly in any of the parties thought this.

KAGAN: Tom is certainly right. I guess I think though, the fact that Trump could get elected tells you that the conditions in terms of public opinion existed to make this possible. I mean, you couldn't have elected someone running on Trump's platform of foreign and even trade policy, as Tom says, in 1988 and 1992, there were people espousing that.

Even during the Obama years, Ryan Paul was running on that and got nowhere, even in the Republican Party. And so things really did shift and, yes, there's an accident about how, you know, every presidential election has its own peculiar qualities.

And even as we watch Trump do and say things that the sort of foreign policy establishment, and the media establishment find absolutely appalling, it's not at all clear that a majority of Americans find it appalling. We know that the majority of Republicans don't. Recent polls show that the majority of Republicans approve of what Trump has been doing, and that's even after the sort of fiasco in Moscow.

But I wouldn't be surprised if many Democrats feel the same way as do how many Independents. So, you know, we couldn't have gotten to this just by electing Donald Trump. This is where the country has been headed. And I think it's mostly based on -- I want to separate what Trump is benefiting from, from Trump himself.

Trump is benefiting from the fact that, I think, since -- and as Tom has alluded to before -- since the end of the Cold War Americans increasingly been wondering why it is that they are engaged in this extensive global involvement.

As long as communism was around, and the Soviet Union was around, even if things went bad, as they went terribly bad in Vietnam, the American people will always say, yeah, but we still have to resist the Soviets and communism.

Once that was gone, I think increasingly it was difficult to make the case, and we saw each successive administration, from George H. W. Bush, to Bill Clinton, to George W. Bush, to Obama, have a harder and harder time convincing the American people that any of these things mattered.

And people thought that was about intervention, and of course it was to some extent,

but I always understood it would also imply rethinking alliances, you know, those are the kinds of global commitments that Americans don't remember why we made them.

So, all of that has always been in place and Trump is now exploiting that, and we'll see where it goes. I think even if Hillary Clinton had been elected she would have had a hard time moving United States back toward this much more engaged approach to the world.

But now let me just say a thing about Trump himself. So, Trump has all that. Like the American people, only more so, he has no memory of why we ever had these alliances in the first place. So, for him it's all on the debit side. There's no memory that we did this to avoid worse catastrophes, which would be more expensive.

So, for him he only sees all the costs of maintaining the order and none of the benefits, and always willing to pull out of all these things. But what I think is becoming increasingly clear, is it's not just that he's indifferent to the liberal world order, he is actively hostile to the liberal world order, and that's where this domestic, foreign nexus comes into play.

I certainly didn't quite realize how this would manifest itself, but if you believe that the liberal world order has been a put-up job on the United States, then all the people who support the liberal world order are basically the enemies of Trump and his followers, and not only need to be ignored, but need to be upended.

So, he has been upending them in the United States, clearly, by winning an election. But look at how sympathetic and supportive he is to all the nationalist, populist movements in Europe. He is hostile to every sitting government in Europe except Viktor Orbán in Hungary, the new Italian Government.

He's hostile to both parties in Germany. He's hostile to both parties in Britain, both of the traditional parties, and he's supporting their opponents who are like him, populist, nationalist who oppose the liberal world order.

It's not surprising he sees nothing wrong with Vladimir Putin, and in fact he actually shares with Putin the goal of undermining the liberal world order.

So, instead of seeing a kind of isolationist America withdrawing into itself, what we actually see is an America led by Donald Trump, as using its power to undermine the very order that it created.

MORELAND: So, I pick up on that point to ask two ask questions of both of you. In that scenario where the United States is actively undercutting the order, it seems highly difficult for the order to survive. So, that's one. The second is, is United States just in neutral toward the order, not opposing it or supporting, could you order survive? And if not what does that future look like?

WRIGHT: You know, I think it can survive. You know, I think 2020 is really important. Obviously I think if he wins it's basically over. Right? I think people basically feel like the American people know what he's like, and they've endorsed it. He will be empowered, his people will be more experienced, that they have a better idea what they want to do, and countries that have been hedging, and clinging on and waiting will give up. Right?

So, all the allies I think are essentially hoping it will change, and trying to buy time. Well, that strategy runs out, the clock runs out in 2021. So, I think it can, but I think it involves somebody else being President, really, after 2020.

I think on the other point, whether or not he's hostile or neutral, and I agree with Bob that he's hostile, but I think what we're looking at him, he's a very unique individual. We can't sort of examine him enough in terms of, you know, what it is that he will do, and he has these visceral beliefs, he has this hostility, all of those things.

He also has some unique sort of cognitive characteristics. Right? He requires instant gratification. He requires the validation that his strategy has succeeded immediately, and that there now is no problem, right?

So, in North Korea he has convinced himself that North Korea is now no longer a threat. Right? He said the other day that after four hours, four hours earlier that the relationship with Russia was the worst ever, and now it's the best ever.

So, in NATO, he said NATO was terrible, and thinking of withdrawing, and how he says it's great because they conceded to him. Now, all of that ridiculous, right, I think without question. But it does sort of raise the question about where he goes from here. Does he have the discipline to maintain that sort of a destructive policy toward the international order? Does he know how to sort of tear it apart?

Or, does he go down lots of rabbit holes, and get distracted and not really be able to do

it. And then you have, internally, I think his team now is more permissive of him than the previous team, and I think they're essentially loyalists who, I think Bolton has essentially put aside his personal views, some of which overlap with Trump, but not all of them, to enable him.

So, Trump is definitely more in control, but even then you don't find -- I mean, the Putin Meeting was really interesting the other day, right. So, he couldn't bring others into the room for the one-on-one to flesh out the relationship, because they would have tried to impose it. They don't want all these working groups.

So, yeah, he sat down with Putin. It was a total catastrophe. I could go on -- you know, I could vent about that for a very long time. The jury is out on whether or not he is capable of executing sort of a strategy that leads to a real partnership with Russian that changes the world, in my opinion, in the worse direction.

You know, so I think he could just fall flat on his face on this, as evidenced by the fact that they seem to spend a lot of their time talking about arresting Americans in the U.S., you know, which is, hopefully, not going to go anywhere.

MORELAND: Bob, I'll give you the final word. Can the order survive, and what's the best case scenario we can hope for, looking forward?

KAGAN: Even before Trump was elected , and before he manifested these particular qualities in foreign policy, I thought the liberal world order was in trouble, because the liberal world order didn’t start to show signs of weakening in January 2017, it was already moving in that direction.

A lot of what's going on in Europe right now that, I think, should we troubling, but particularly the rise of nationalist, right-wing populist parties began earlier, is partly a response to, I would argue, the United States' failure to do anything in Syria, which then allowed a massive refugee flow into Europe, which then destabilized European political institutions.

And that's the origin, in many ways of the problem that we are seeing in Europe. I also think that it was pretty clear to everyone in the world during the Obama years that America's commitment to playing the global role it had been playing for 70 years was waning, and that Obama himself talked about nation building at home not abroad, about allies as free riders, et cetera, et cetera.

So, my view before Trump was even neutral is not enough to support the world order. If you think about how this world order was created, it was created by an enormous and consistent exertion of American power and influence around the world, in Asia, and Europe and the Middle East over 40, 50 years.

The notion that we could dial back our involvement, even to the Obama level, and still think that it's upheld, you can only believe that if you think that somehow the order is natural and self-sustaining. My argument is, it's unnatural, and requires tremendous efforts to sustain.

So, even if we move to indifference, I think the order was weakening, and was going to weaken, so if you add to that, if you move from indifference to hostility, which is where we are right now, I think the order is in real serious trouble.

Let me just say, there is a sort of certain question, well, we still have troops in Europe, in fact we even augmented troops in Europe under Obama and Trump, we still have good relations with some countries, et cetera, et cetera. And so on substance, they say pay no attention to the rhetoric, that's pretty much the argument.

But the rhetoric is absolutely crucial, because it's not just rhetoric, it's an indication of where America is going, and the most important question for every country in the world, on every continent, in terms of their geopolitical situation, their foreign policy, the first and most important question is: what is the United States going to do?

Because that's the system that was created after World War II, and if the perception is, the United States is turning away from its allies, as Tom said, everyone is going to have to make another kind of arrangement.

Whether it's appeasing adversaries, whether it's arming themselves, I would expect Japan ultimately will arm themselves even more than they are, and probably go nuclear, we can see countries adjusting, even today, to the rhetoric and statements of Donald Trump.

MORELAND: Well, okay --

KAGAN: I was supposed to answer the question, what's the best-case scenario. (Laughter) I don't have a good-case scenario right now.

MORELAND: Well, we'll say it's a jury prognostication, but a call to arms, a call to action to do more.

Thank you both. Bob Kagan, author of *The Jungle Grows Back*, coming out in September. And Tom Wright, author of *All Measures Short of War*, to be released in paperback, September as well. Thank you both.

WRIGHT: Thank you.

KAGAN: Thank you.

PITA: Thanks to Will Moreland for hosting. And thanks to you, our listeners, for tuning in.

As always, you can go to the show notes at Brookings.edu/Intersections, for links to Tom Wright's book, and related articles from both he and Bob Kagan.