

## THE ASSAULT ON AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: A CALL TO ACTION

As American diplomats around the world and national security leaders here at home, we saw no greater cause than serving our fellow citizens. We swore to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic. *Foreign and domestic*. None of us thought the second part of that phrase would ever come into play -- until now.

American global leadership has depended on many factors, including political, economic, and military power. But most important was the moral foundation for that power -- America as an example to others. Though our actions didn't always live up to our ideals, we stood for simple but powerful ideas that people everywhere embraced: democracy, equality, individual liberty, and human rights.

That moral foundation is now in grave danger. The challenge comes from within, as President Trump and his administration have assaulted the pillars of our democracy here at home and our strength around the world.

Internationally, Trump has questioned the value of long-standing alliances in Europe and Asia. On our borders, he has poisoned ties with our closest neighbors. He has undermined the bedrock principle of world peace that sovereign borders will be respected. The United States now seeks to lay claim to Greenland, the Panama Canal, and Canada, greenlighting other countries to proceed as they see fit, most notably Russia in Ukraine. The global economic order that ushered in a period of unparalleled prosperity for Americans is being undermined by Trump's senseless tariffs and war on legally binding trade agreements. America as the first responder to global humanitarian crises becomes a distant memory with the dismantling of USAID.

Domestically, Trump is aggressively eliminating constraints on his power and fomenting fear. He is intimidating independent media outlets with frivolous lawsuits. Our universities are retreating from freedom of speech because of explicit threats to withdraw federal monies. Our law firms are being bludgeoned into denying representation to anyone whom this administration does not like. Our medical research centers are seeing an exodus of experts forced out by an administration that does not believe in basic science. Congress and the Department of Justice threaten to impeach sitting judges that rule against the government. Federal trade unions have been shut down by executive order. State governments that challenge the administration face cuts in federal funding. A racist, misogynistic and homophobic mindset is leading to the erasure of history

and national heroes at our cultural institutions. In a country with a proud history of immigration, legal residents are being illegally deported for expressing an opinion. People are whisked off the street by masked officials in unmarked cars or sent off to imprisonment abroad without due process. Trump talks publicly about an unconstitutional third term without a word of concern from his own party.

American democracy and American security are inextricably linked; weaken one and the other inevitably begins to fail. As patriots and public servants from both parties who worked to protect America over many decades, we see that link unraveling at lightning speed. Many of us have served in countries where democratically elected leaders followed a path to autocracy, and we know this crisis requires an urgent and unified response. As a result, we call for the following:

--Former senior officials, including presidents, secretaries of state, secretaries of defense, and chiefs of staff of our military services must jointly and publicly challenge the administration's dangerous policies and dismantling of essential institutions.

--Business leaders must condemn Trump's disastrous trade policy which is plunging the global economy into chaos and disrupting supply chains that support millions of jobs.

--Medical institutions, like the CDC, NIH, and major research centers around the country must defend science with non-partisan funding of medical investigation and warn of the dangers of abandoning global engagement on pandemic prevention.

--Universities and media must protect free speech. Without a unified stance, they will be picked off one-by-one and first amendment rights for every American will be in peril.

--Our largest law firms must remain guardians of the rule of law by resisting administration pressure to undermine the legal system of checks and balances which is so fundamental to our democracy.

--Finally, politicians on both sides of the aisle who believe in the core values of our constitution must actively oppose the administration's efforts to undermine our national security, our freedoms, and our democracy. Waiting passively for the electoral calendar to fight back does nothing more than give the administration additional time and running room to impose its authoritarian stamp ever more securely on government and on all of us.

No American should be silent. No American who cares about our freedoms, our institutions, and our identity as a nation can afford to be a bystander. Each of us in different walks of life must do what we can -- speak out, mobilize, defend our way of life. The moment requires nothing less. We must recognize the seriousness of what is taking place and act collectively to restore our democracy and our security. If we do not, the American ideals of liberty, prosperity, and equality will quickly become relics of the past.

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