

Can a Divided America Lead in a Fragmented World? The Tension between Internationalism and Isolationism

Opening keynote by Governor James S. Gilmore III at CAPRI 2024 Annual Forum

May 6, 2024

Taipei

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to address a distinguished group of people here today from the Taiwan community and all the others who are joining us this morning. I'm honored to have been given the opportunity to be the keynote speaker in this very significant conference, and we're all grateful that you're here and that you'll be participating in this and also in public affairs far beyond the conference. So, we're delighted that you're here and I'm very happy to have a chance to do this.

Bear in mind that America is a Pacific nation. Sometimes I think here in this community and communities in Asia we seem a long way away across such a vast ocean. But the truth is that the United States is a Pacific nation, and we have stake in this area, in this part of the world. So, it's no surprise that we would have an interest and I'm happy to be able to underscore that today. So really the topic today is, "Can a divided America lead in a fragmented world?"

Well, look, don't pay too much attention to the divisions in America. Somehow, we always manage to settle all these things. We are a democracy, a republic. We argue with ourselves. We get into real controversies. But the resilience of America is that we can deal with these issues so successfully and overcome them through our own political systems. So, the question is, "Can America lead in a fragmented world?" I'll talk about that, but at the end, I will tell you that the answer is yes. America can provide leadership. We can do that, particularly at this moment in time.

It feels to me like we are at a real crossroads right now with the post-World War II period, the post-Cold War period winding down now and the emergence of new major powers in China and in Russia together with the United States and others. It's a difference between their outlook and the outlook not only of my country but of your countries all across the East and Western Pacific. The difference here is that there are countries that have a different view, a different world view of what the future should look like. You can't really underscore that. You can't really soft-pedal this. Both China and Russia have a different idea about

what the world should look like. I like to talk about it as the society with the knock on the door at night. We've seen it all down through history, particularly in the 20th-century, authoritarian countries. Governments believe that they have the power to really control their citizens entirely and it usually ends up manifesting itself with the knock on the door at night and people being taken away, to be interrogated, sometimes beaten, and sometimes murdered in the name of an authoritarian government or an authoritarian country. That is what we are dealing with right now.

Let me talk just a moment about that. People's Republic of China has an entirely different way of looking at the world than the democracies across the world. They believe in the control of people. They cut off information, which is not going now to the people of China so that they have a different worldview that's more in line with their government. Whereas we in the West believe in the complete openness of information so that we can decide for ourselves as individuals, not as part of a collective, but decide for ourselves as individuals what the world should look like, monitoring people everywhere that you go in these authoritarian countries. There's even a report, which you all are of course aware of, a social scoring type of approach in China. Whereas if you really behave a little more, a little more freedom or a different point of view, you may not get such a good social score, which could have all kinds of negative consequences. These are the elements of control of people that don't really exist across the world today, except in these countries, but these countries intend to extend it if they possibly can.

I was doing some reading about the People's Republic of China in preparation for this talk, and I noticed that what they're really saying out there is that the rights of individuals, rights of citizens, rights of human beings come from the state. We Americans don't believe that.

From the very beginning of our independent nation, back in 1776, we have rejected the idea that rights come from the state. Rights have been designated in our Declaration of Independence of coming from God, coming from God, or at least from the nature of human beings. I think that we can all agree, no matter what our particular faith or what kind of religion that we have, that we can believe that human beings absolutely want to be free people in the world today, and some of these countries don't want that. They believe that the best future is the control of people.

You know, it's not working for the Chinese Republic. There have been polls out

there that show that within the Asian—South, East Asian—nations, that organizations, they were polled and asked what the future should be like, and the answer there was that seven out of ten of the peoples of those countries prefer the future that the United States offers together with our allies and our friends. In Africa, there's been a great deal of discussion about the Chinese moving into Africa and beginning to expand their influence there, but the same poll showed that only 22% of the people polled in Africa in those particular countries within that poll believe that China is the correct model for the future. Now, these are very good things because it means that we still have an opportunity to win the conflict which is upon us that this conference is just beginning to address.

Russia is the other country, and one that, of course, I'm intimately involved with as the former ambassador to OSCE, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, where I was the United States ambassador and located in Vienna, Austria, dealing with 57 other countries, virtually the entire northern hemisphere. But Russia has no central organizing theory. Their whole idea that they used to have of communism is gone. At least it's gone in Russia. And now we see that there is no organizing principle. Putin only has one organizing principle, is the reestablishment of a great Russian empire. I can report to you that there are people all across the globe and especially centered in Europe that want no part of being part of a Russian empire, and they're prepared to resist, including what we're seeing right now in Ukraine, which I believe is the pivot of the future. Iran also is a country that now wants to drive Israel out of the Middle East, which eliminates, of course, a key American ally in the Middle East, but their goal is to drive Israel out. But they're not going to be able to consolidate a future. The Shia and the Sunni countries are too much at odds with each other. Iran's not going to be able to do that.

So, North Korea is another country that wants to create difficulties, but at the end of the day, they really can only be a supporting player for these other countries.

America can lead. America has led. But the discussion that we're seeing right now so often is America first. Well, I tell you now that there may be a sense in America of America first, but it is not America alone. America is stronger. Our country is stronger. We are your best ally when we work with other people, and we know that we have our friends.

Yes, the United States can lead. We all know the basic facts. Our gross domestic product in the United States is just a little over \$27 trillion. The next economy behind us is China, 17, almost 18 trillion. Russia, 4 trillion. So, the United States is

a powerful economy which then, of course, supports our philosophy and our activity together with our efforts and our friends. But I might mention that we also have a debt in the United States that many of my colleagues worry about. In fact, our national debt is \$34 trillion. So, it's something that we're going to have to address. But in the meanwhile, the American economy is powerful and then supports our geopolitics and the friends that we have across the world.

The Declaration says that rights are human rights, that they come within the laws of nature. That's within the American Declaration. The Declaration says that human beings are endowed with these rights by their creator or by nature, not by the state and not by control of people, their liberties, their rights, their way of life by the state. Not that. We have independent rights that come independently from any state. And what do we stand for as Westerners, as people who have allies both East and West? We stand for democracy. We stand for the rule of law. And we stand for human rights. And people live this way because of those restraints upon a state, whereas some of these countries believe that that role is unlimited.

When I was at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, we talked about the priorities that we were facing and that we were trying to do, and it is consistent with the philosophy that I'm laying out here in this keynote speech. My goal as ambassador was to reassure our allies. We should reassure our allies because so many people are trying to teach our allies and the citizens of our allies that America is not dependable, that we cannot lead because we are divided, because we are in controversy, and we are an undependable ally. That is a lie, and it is a deliberate lie that is put forward by our adversaries who wish to create a darker future for the 21st century. So, my goal was to reassure our allies as I reassure you today. My goal was to draw countries that were not decided about the future to the United States and to our allies. My goal was to message to the world that we were doing the right thing and communicate to the world. My goal was to stop Russia from trying to invade Europe and upset the entire status quo in Europe and try to create a large empire. And my goal was to speak to the Russian people. Because you see, ladies and gentlemen, liberty exists in the hearts of every human being everywhere, everybody everywhere, including the Chinese people and the Russian people, and that is a fundamental truth. If we are able to speak to them, then they, of course, sooner or later, will stand for their own rights, the rights that they inherently have, which are not granted by a state, and that is why China is cutting off information to the Chinese people because they understand the danger of good ideas and ideas of liberty and freedom.

The second element, though, I think of leadership is respect. I believe that what we're seeing in large measure today, and I hear it over and over again, is China thinks they're not respected. They seem to have an insecurity among themselves that Americans and our allies don't have. We're a very secure people, but the Chinese seem to... the People's Republic of China government seems to be insecure. So, when I was at OSCE and I was speaking to the Russians, I was letting them know that we respected them, and we do respect the people in these powerful countries. We respect them very much. I remember that America sometimes gets a little too strong and a little too aggressive.

You all probably all like movies, don't you? You like movies? Sure. Well, there's a musical, an old movie called 1776. It's my favorite musical. You can look it up sometime, and it really is a musical about the establishment of America at the time of the Declaration of Independence. And I remember in that movie John Adams said, well, we just have to tell these people what to do. We have to tell them what to do in order to establish our Declaration of Independence so that we can start it. And Benjamin Franklin was quoted in the movie as saying, John, you can't just order people around like ribbon clerks. They're real people, distinguished leaders of their states. I don't know if Benjamin Franklin said that or not, but it sounds like him. Respect. If we give respect to our adversaries as well as our allies and our friends, that goes a long way to undermining the way that these things are going in the world today.

The third, that's something that I actually learned by reading Shirley Lin's book, which is America really needs to be thinking about the impact of what we do on other countries. For example, our CHIPS program, where we're beginning to bring back our industry within the United States in order to make sure that we're creating some independence for ourselves and that. We have to recognize the bearing that that has on Taiwan and its industry. Why should we do that? Because Taiwan is our friend. And we have a stake in the success and strength and friendship of Taiwan as well as so many of the other countries across the world as well.

There's a lot of discussion about President Trump and deliberate effort to inject fear not only in the American people but in the citizens of our allies as well. But I report to you as many people in this room know that the United States just passed a support bill, a very key support bill for Ukraine, and a key support bill for the Middle East and Israel, and a key support for Taiwan. It's an important message that America is sending by the passage of that bill. That bill probably

could have been stopped. It probably could have been stopped. But Speaker Johnson decided that it was something that should be done and he took a political risk by pushing it forward. And then he flew to Florida to see President Trump and discuss the matter with him. And they came out and had a joint press conference and President Trump said, I support the Speaker. And he also said that he had a reason why the money that American taxpayers are giving perhaps should be loans. There was a working together in order to advance this interest. And that would not have happened if we had a potential president there that was going to be a problem for our allies and for the rest of the world.

Let me also say very quickly that we don't know who's going to win that election, ladies and gentlemen. President Biden very well may be reelected. It would be normal for a president to be reelected. It would be normal. And he may very well be elected. But it's a close election. President Trump is under consideration not only in America but among the citizens and friends of our allies as well.

The United States has done the right thing in order to try to create peace in the world. And we're entitled to some respect of our own and some credit for trying to make the world a safer and better place.

I remind you that we have over time over the last number of years reached out to Russia in order to try to create friendship. And we feel betrayed because that's now been slapped back in our face. Also with China, the most famous example, where we normalize relations with the People's Republic of China. We did not expect then the Chinese would turn out to be aggressive and to try to create a dominant power of their own in the Western Pacific where we have interest. We didn't expect that. So, we've done everything that we can do to extend the hand of friendship and it's been slapped back into our face. And Americans think about that as we move forward because we will protect ourselves and we will lead and protect our friends. That's what America does. The people of the world are with us. The citizens of America, the citizens of Taiwan, citizens across Europe, the people are with us.

In my view, over time, we will see that the people of China and the people of Russia are with us. Why? Because human rights and liberties exist in the breast of every human being. And that's why the authoritarians are going to have so much trouble over the long run. They're not going to be able to proceed successfully to try to put the state and dominate the state over everybody because the dominance and destruction of human rights—the knock on the door—is not within the breast of every human being, and liberty is. The people of

the world are with us. We all have a common purpose.

You only need to think back to what we saw at Tiananmen Square. The idea of liberty in China was there. It was crushed, but only temporarily. We saw it in Russia in 1989. That was a really good moment when democracy might have prevailed in 1989 with discussions between the Americans and our allies and the Russians. That has been crushed by Putin, but only temporarily. Ukraine demonstrates the love of independence, sovereignty, and the liberty of people that exists in the breast of every human being. And these are the principles that I put forward and that we put forward and it is a leading principle.

And I can assure all of you today as we go forward, the answer to your question is even though we are a country that argues with ourselves, the question is, can we lead into the 21st century? We will never lead alone, but we will be able to lead. Thank you very much for the chance to be with you this morning and deliver this keynote.