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# PROVIDENCE

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ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-TWO HOURS & FIFTY YEARS:  
A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL OREN

THE SEVENTH DAY & COUNTING:  
THE ELUSIVE PEACE OF THE SIX-DAY WAR  
JOSHUA MURAVCHIK

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A POPE & A PRESIDENT:  
JOHN PAUL II, RONALD REAGAN, & THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM  
PAUL KENGOR

ALSO: ROBERT KAUFMAN BACKS THOMISTIC OFFENSE • CHRISTOPHER KOLAKOWSKI REMEMBERS BATAAN • C.S. LEWIS CELEBRATES THE 1ST SERVANT • ALAN DOWD INTERROGATES AMERICAN INTERVENTION • MARK TOOLEY ON AMERICAN INTERESTS • GENERAL MACARTHUR CONSTRUCTS A MAN • MARK COPPENGHER OFFERS AIDE TO THOSE SNOWED-IN • GEORGE ELIOT LAUDS A SPOT OF NATIVE LAND & ROBERT NICHOLSON PUTS SIX DAYS IN PROPER CONTEXT

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*Army Chief Chaplain Rabbi Shlomo Goren, surrounded by Israeli Defense Force soldiers of the Paratroop Brigade, blows the shofar in front of the Kotel ha-Ma'aravi, or Western Wall, during the Six-Day War, June 7, 1967. Built by Herod the Great, the Kotel is a segment of a much longer, ancient, limestone retaining wall that encased the hill known as the Temple Mount. Under the British Mandate of Palestine, the blowing of the shofar at the Kotel was criminalized, and from 1948-1967, when the Old City of Jerusalem was controlled by Jordan, Jews were denied access to the Wall entirely. Today, in accordance to agreements with Muslim authorities, the Kotel is the holiest place on earth where Jews are allowed to pray. Photo Credit: David Rubinger, Government Press Office.*

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# AMERICAN INTERESTS & HUMAN RIGHTS

MARK TOOLEY



President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump join King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia and the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, on May 21, 2017, to participate in the inaugural opening of the Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology. Photo by Shealah Craighead. Source: White House.

For a century American foreign policy has often purportedly seesawed between cold focus on American interests through *realpolitik* or high-minded advocacy of democracy and human rights. The former was, in popular perception, embodied by Teddy Roosevelt or more recently by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. The latter was, ostensibly, incarnated by Woodrow Wilson or more recently by George W. Bush. Donald Trump's speech in Saudi

Arabia on May 21 further confirms he is a realist and not a Wilsonian.

"In my inaugural address to the American People, I pledged to strengthen America's oldest friendships, and to build new partnerships in pursuit of peace," Trump told scores of heads of state from majority-Muslim countries. "I also promised that America will not seek to impose our way of life on others, but to outstretch our

hands in the spirit of cooperation and trust."

Trump promised not to "lecture":

America is a sovereign nation and our first priority is always the safety and security of our citizens. We are not here to lecture. We are not here to tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship.

Instead, we are here to offer partnership based on shared interests and values to pursue a better future.

And Trump extolled realism over idealism:

For our part, America is committed to adjusting our strategies to meet evolving threats and new facts. We will discard those strategies that have not worked—and will apply new approaches informed by experience and judgment. We are adopting a Principled Realism, rooted in common values and shared interests.

Those “common values” of course were not identified as democracy and human rights but resistance to terrorism and extremism:

Our goal is a coalition of nations who share the aim of stamping out extremism and providing our children a hopeful future that does honor to God. And so this historic and unprecedented gathering of leaders—unique in the history of nations—is a symbol to the world of our shared resolve and our mutual respect. To the leaders and citizens of every country assembled here today, I want you to know that the United States is eager to form closer bonds of friendship, security, culture and commerce.

Trump focused on security as “shared interests”:

Terrorism has spread across the world. But the path to peace begins right here, on this ancient

soil, in this sacred land. America is prepared to stand with you—in pursuit of shared interests and common security.

Plus:

Here at this summit we will discuss many interests we share together. But above all we must be united in pursuing the one goal that transcends every other consideration. That goal is to meet history's great test—to conquer extremism and vanquish the forces of terrorism.

And Trump emphasized realism's preference for security over “ideology” and “perfection”:

Our friends will never question our support, and our enemies will never doubt our determination. Our partnerships will advance security through stability, not through radical disruption. We will make decisions based on real-world outcomes—not inflexible ideology. We will be guided by the lessons of experience, not the confines of rigid thinking. And, wherever possible, we will seek gradual reforms—not sudden intervention. We must seek partners, not perfection—and to make allies of all who share our goals.

Trump's only implied reference to human rights was aimed at Syria's Assad, who “has committed unspeakable crimes,” and Iran, for which he prayed “for the day when the Iranian people have the just and righteous government they deserve.”

Maybe Trump's Saudi speech echoes Nixon's approach in his 1972 visit to communist China, with whom he sought collaboration against the Soviet Union, not commonality on democracy:

You believe deeply in your system, and we believe just as deeply in our system. It is not our common beliefs that have brought us together here, but our common interests and our common hopes, the interest that each of us has to maintain our independence and the security of our peoples and the hope that each of us has to build a new world order in which nations and peoples with different systems and different values can live together in peace, respecting one another while disagreeing with one another, letting history rather than the battlefield be the judge of their different ideas.

Nixon believed national interests and balance of power were surer guides to security and peace than lofty human rights ideals. Yet he was not indifferent to the Wilsonian tradition in American statecraft. For all his hard-nosed rhetoric, Nixon was a Quaker who deeply identified with the Presbyterian Wilson's relentless pursuit of world peace through the spread of democratic principles superintended by disinterested American power.

At a 1970 prayer breakfast, Nixon sounded like Wilson, whom he deeply admired and whose portrait he chose to display:

We do have a destiny, not a destiny to conquer the world or to exploit the world, but a destiny



*President Richard Nixon and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai toast on February 25, 1972. Source: Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, via Wikimedia Commons.*

to give something more to the world simply than an example which other nations in the past have been able to give of great military strength and great economic wealth, to give to other nations of the world an example of spiritual leadership and idealism which no material strength or military power can provide.

In his 1972 address to the Soviet Union, Nixon further echoed Wilson:

We covet no one else's territory, we seek no dominion over any other people, we seek the right to live in peace, not only for ourselves but for all the peoples of this earth. Our power will only be used to keep the peace,

never to break it, only to defend freedom, never to destroy it. No nation that does not threaten its neighbors has anything to fear from the United States.

Kissinger did not share his president's grudging commitment to Wilsonian ideals but admitted those ideals are intrinsic to American character and cannot be ignored in a successful foreign policy that has the required backing of the American people.

Wilson did not invent the image of America as custodian of democracy, but refined an understanding dating to the Puritans, solidified by later waves of evangelical revivalism followed by the immigrant experience of Catholics and Jews fleeing oppression.

Successful foreign policy presidents like Reagan harmonize the American expectation of national interest with advocacy for democracy and human rights. Collaboration and alliances with tyrannies like Saudi Arabia or communist China are often strategically and even morally imperative if they balance against greater evils. But for America to remain in continuity with its historical soul and innately religious character, presidents must at least articulate our ongoing hope and prayer for a world that is safe for democracy and human rights, which are ultimately gifts of the Almighty. Words, even if aspirational, have power. P

**Mark Tooley** is president of the Institute on Religion & Democracy and co-publisher and editor of *Providence*.