

Justin: Welcome back to another episode of Bush School Uncorked. I'm your host, Justin Bullock.

Gregory: I'm your co-host, Gregory Gause.

Justin: And we are recording live in historic Downtown Bryan at Downtown Uncorked on a Tuesday at 6PM. I got it all right, finally.

Gregory: That's a good time stamp. We want to thank our friends at Downtown Uncorked for hosting us once again, and we particularly want to thank them for keeping the noise down this time. Because the last time they had, I think they had every Democrat in Brazos County, was here at the-

John: How many was that?

Justin: All four.

Gregory: It was 12. I think it was the meeting of the Brazos County Democratic Committee and they were a rowdy bunch. And so it's a little quieter today and I think that, that's a good atmosphere for a discussion of this serious topic.

Justin: And we actually have somebody who knows something with us this time, whereas last time it was just me and you rambling on. We actually have a true expert this time.

Gregory: Yeah, how unusual for us.

Justin: How unusual for us. So a couple announcements before we introduce our guest and jump into our topic this evening. We have two more live recordings coming up in October. Those will be on October 22nd and October 29th, both of those are Tuesdays coming up later in the month. The first is titled The Third Sector in Improving Outcomes For Society. Professor Will Brown and Ellie Qu are supposed to be with us that evening. And then on October 29th, Professors Anne Bowman and Rob Greer will be us and we'll be discussing Local Governments as Engines of Policy Innovation. So that's what's coming-

Gregory: That'll lead us into Halloween.

Justin: It will lead us into Halloween and will shift from international affairs to all the way down to-

Gregory: To the locals. To the local.

Justin: Okay, I think that's all the announcements I have.

Gregory: You know what our slogan here at Bush Uncorked is?

John: What do we have now?

Gregory: Think local, drink global. No, no, no. No. It should be, "Think Global, Drink Local."

Justin: Oh, okay. That's better, yeah.

Gregory: That's what it should be. Yeah.

Justin: We got good jokes early today. We're not even wound up yet. With us today we have Professor John Schuessler, who is one of our colleagues at the Bush School at Texas A&M University, and I'm going to let him just take a moment and tell us a little bit of his intellectual history, academic history, how he kind of sees himself as a scholar, and his current positions. We had him on last season because we were talking about the Albritton Center of Grand Strategy. And he's kind enough to come back with us. We didn't make it too unpleasant the first time.

John: No, no. It was raucous fun, so.

Justin: So, yeah, just as a reminder if you can tell us just who you are, how you see yourself as a academic, and kind of what you're working on now.

John: Sure. So thank you for having me. I'll kind of start with the present and wind back briefly. So currently I'm a Associate Professor in the Department of International Affairs, where I work for Dr. Greg Gause-

Gregory: I'm his boss.

John: That is correct.

Justin: Boss his here.

John: And so in that capacity, I teach courses on International Relations Theory in American Grand Strategy. I am also one of two academic directors of the Albritton Center for Grand Strategy, which is a relatively new center that we talked about last time. Before coming to the Bush School now 4 years ago, basically, I worked-

Gregory: Time does fly when you're having fun, doesn't it, John?

Justin: Four years?

John: Time flies at the Bush School.

Justin: This is our 6th year, Greg.

Gregory: Yeah.

Justin: Can you believe that? Oh my gosh.

John: It's nutty. So I came here, I worked for 7 years at the Air War College, which is a graduate school for largely military officers and I taught in the Department of Strategy there. And before that, I was getting my PhD at the Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago, which is known for its emphasis on theory and history, which are my two-

Gregory: And cruelty.

John: And cruelty. My first, second, and third loves. And, yes, it's known for the Realist Tradition, which I was socialized into, although, again, my first love is theory more broadly. But, yes, realism did wear on me over time and tends to be how I think, so.

Gregory: Although, we'll-

Justin: [crosstalk 00:04:36] just chips away.

Gregory: We'll talk a lot about realism.

Justin: I'm excited.

Gregory: Yeah, because there's lots of grand strategies that fall under that-

John: There could be-

Gregory: Realist tense.

John: Yes, there could be.

Gregory: Including President Trump's.

Justin: Well, let's just jump right in. Is there anything else, John, is there anything else we should capture about you for the audience?

John: I don't think so. I wrote my first book, Deceit on the Road to War, about presidents and their lack of candor with the public about major war decisions.

Gregory: That lack of candor means lying.

John: Lying. Deception, a little softer than lying.

Justin: No, and covering up what was actually-

Gregory: I read the book. It's about lying.

Justin: This is actually one of the first episodes of Public Problems as well, right? Yeah, you came and talked about the book.

John: And then I've also written about a realist approach to foreign policy and I've written a more recent article about the Trump Administration and their approach to NATO and what light history can shed on kind of their rough bargaining tactics. So, there we go.

Justin: So I want to get to grand strategy and the current administration quickly, but for the audience, because I am new to international affairs and knew little to nothing before I became acquainted with Greg and now I feel like I have a distorted view, but what is-

Gregory: We're here to educate the unwashed.

Justin: What is-

Gregory: And that's my job with you.

Justin: Yeah, I need it. What is realism? So, before we go and kind of think about the big picture of grand strategy and how we might think about a US grand strategy, what is realism? I know we've talked about this before on the podcast, but just give me the quick snapshot of what is realism.

Gregory: And in hour 2 we'll start talking about Trump's grand strategy.

John: Are you sure you want to open that Pandora's Box? At the broadest level, realism is, we'll it's an intellectual tradition that leads you to emphasize certain things over others. So what does it lead you to emphasize? Power defined in material terms. It leads you to emphasize the national interests defined in terms of power and it leads you to kind of in terms of state craft, an emphasis on prudence and emphasizing the vital over the peripheral or the necessary over the desirable. And realists then tend to be very interested in how to place limits on the use of power that reflect those basic enduring factors of power, the national interest, etc. And if you want more, just take I have a theory class where my students have to endure weeks of this kind of discussion.

Gregory: So, yeah. Okay. But prudence that's a particular brand of realism. Because Attila the Hun was a realist too, right? He was all about material power and conquest and, I think, we would be hard pressed to say that every realist strategy is a prudence strategy. Power maximization can take you beyond your means, but you could be going to maximize your material power in a way that I think realists would say, "Yeah. Sure. That's the way states behave."

John: Well, in the way I understand prudence is basically don't do anymore than you have to, but at the limit there is this problem, which is if no one can stop you from doing anything, then there's no limiting principle. So realists have always had this kind of ambivalence about power. On the one hand, you want to have a fair amount of it because if you don't you can be bullied. On the other, if you have too much it's corrupting and can lead to excess. And that's where the emphasis on prudence comes from. The issue I think that you're pointing to is there's nothing within the framework that says, "Only do so much unless the costs start outweighing the benefits." And that's

why there's usually a lot of pushback against realism for not having some limiting, some moral standard that says, "No. Use your power for this purpose."

Gregory: Right.

John: Now, conveniently, being an American Realist, that problem is solved because in our view, many of our view, the US is a very secure country that doesn't actually have to be very active abroad and so it's easy to say this or that is not prudent because it's not necessary. It's hard-

Gregory: We've got thunder and lightning. The Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, right?

John: Exactly. And-

Gregory: We are protected. Although, Canada is... these Canadians.

Justin: I feel threatened.

Gregory: Yeah.

John: But, yes, that is the point. It's different if you are Germany in 1914 or China today, where some realists would say, "You know, China today. Yes, you're being aggressive, but we get it. You're a rising power and you deserve to have more sway in your neighborhood and who are we to tell you, you can't throw your weight around?"

Gregory: So that might be a good segue into what's going on now. So would you say it would fall under the tent of the Theory of Realism for the Chinese to be very aggressive in the South China Sea? To do what they're doing, to build out these artificial islands, to establish claims on territorial control at sea, to push against Taiwan, which they've been relatively reluctant to do, but who knows? To push against Vietnam, to push against the United States. Is that a realist strategy? Or is that imprudent?

John: It could be. And, again, as my students can attest, there are a lot of intra-family disagreements within realism. Probably the most important is the offensive vs. defensive realist debate, which gets right to this question. The basic offensive realist position is every other great power should want to be like the US in the following sense: the US has it made. We're a hegemon in the Western Hemisphere and we don't have to worry about anything, the Canadians, the Mexicans. We're surrounded by-

Gregory: I would still say we might have to worry about the Canadians.

John: Okay. South Park movie aside.

Gregory: Yeah. Well you can go back to Canadian bacon, which was a...

John: Yes, that's true.

- Justin: Was that an attack?
- Gregory: Strange Brew was also, I think, based on a Canadian-American War.
- John: So if you set aside the insidious Canadian threat, the point is why shouldn't China seek to achieve the same hegemonic status in their neighborhood that the US achieved in its neighborhood? Because if you can achieve that, you have it made. Now, the defensive realist counter is it's one thing to aim for dominance in your neighborhood if you can actually achieve it, but if the attempt at getting there is going to ruin you, which it tends to do to the great powers that have tried it, the game's not worth the candle. And beyond that, in most situations, to be secure you don't need that level of dominance. Great powers can actually coexist more than the offensive realist perspective would lead you to expect.
- John: And the point that I think a lot of people would agree on is the US is just a weird case. It is hegemonic-
- Gregory: We are weirdos.
- John: We're weird.
- Gregory: There's absolutely no question about that.
- John: We achieved hegemony the cheap and easy way. There just wasn't a lot of opposition as the US was rising to hegemonic status in 19-
- Gregory: Well, I don't know. World War II was not cheap.
- John: We were already a regional hegemony by-
- Gregory: Oh, regional hegemony? Okay.
- John: Yeah, yeah. Not global. So the point is that-
- Gregory: Thank you, President Monroe.
- John: Well, it certainly has made me more interested in the founders and in the Civil War period because that is the story of American dominance as written in the 19th Century. And since then, it's basically just been about maintaining our status as the only hegemonic power in the system.
- Gregory: We should probably say for some of the listeners, that the Monroe Doctrine was announced by President Monroe, actually formulated by his Secretary of State, who is John Quincy Adams, who succeeded him as president, who was probably America's greatest 19th Century diplomat, John Quincy Adams. Stop nodding. It's a podcast. Say yes. You've got to say yes. You've got to say yes.

- John: Yes, I agree with you, Greg.
- Gregory: That basically said at a time when America really didn't have the naval power to enforce it, that the United States would tolerate absolutely no European interference anywhere in the Americas. North America, South America, anywhere in the Americas. And we were fortunate enough that European power politics allowed us to enforce that doctrine while we were building our power.
- John: Yeah. So the consummate, if you are a regional hegemon like the United States, a lot of realists would argue that the next step is to "be an offshore balancer." And the point is, if you want to be basically uninterfered with in your neighborhood, you want to keep all the other major powers busy competing with each other in their neighborhoods. And how do you do that? Well, you kind of intervene when you have to, to prevent any one of them from dominating, which I think does a decent job of explaining when you get the big movements. The intervention into World War I, the intervention into World War II, containment to some extent in the Cold War. I think that's not all that's going on, to be clear. I think realism has some blind spots about some other ambitions in American grand strategy, but I think that's an important part of the story. That this isn't about morality, this is about sitting pretty. The US is a great place to live because we don't have to deal with threats. I will say that 10 times and repeat it.
- Gregory: I think it's a great place to live for other reasons as well, but-
- John: Well, sure. If it were a police state without-
- Gregory: A police state with no threats wouldn't be the greatest place to live.
- John: I'll never forget one of my graduate mentors, he would often say, "The poor people that were born in Poland in the middle of the 20... or South Korea." And he wasn't saying, "I don't like Poles or South..." He was saying, "Geo-politically this is not their fault, but it's a disastrous place to be. You're a weak power in a very vulnerable spot." It's just great to be born in America at the time after the US achieves regional hegemony and-
- Gregory: Amen.
- John: Amen. And so there's probably as much jingoism as I'm capable of. But I will say that.
- Justin: So our topic is Grand Strategy in the Trump Era, is how we titled tonight. So when you mention grand strategy, and I know when we had you on last we talked a little bit about grand strategy, but what is grand strategy? What types of pieces do we need to be thinking about so then we can apply that to what it's like under the current president? So what types of factors should we be considering in grand strategy?
- John: Sure. There's an article I use a lot in my teaching that lays out three kind of definitions of grand strategy that I think are helpful. One, and the most tangible, is plans. So-
- Gregory: So much for this administration.

John: Well, but this administration released a national security strategy and they released a national defense strategy and that actually, it's not a bad place to start. You can go, "All right. How does this government think about American interests and how to pursue them?" Now, these documents are flawed in their own right because they're political documents and no administrations going to lay out all the hard trade offs in a public document. There's a second, I think, definition then that's useful, which is a set of ideas or organizing principles. So the canonical example is containment. So over time in the Cold War you get different written strategies that are orienting the American Government and it's competition with the Soviet Union, but from an early point you can see a few big ideas that are structuring that competition that are laid most explicitly by George Kennan but get developed by others. And then, finally, is just behavior. Look at how a great power acts. Where does it, for me, the litmus test is where is it willing to send its people to fight and die? Then you can kind of figure out this is what a great power cares about.

Gregory: The Middle East.

John: Interesting, right? And yet, every administration wants to do less there. So-

Justin: It's worth thinking about the system in terms of goals and general dominant kind of ideas or means or ways of thinking about things and then how the power actually behaves in practice.

John: And you can use each of those as an indicator of what are the interests at stake, what are the threats that then have to be counter to those interests, and what kind of power are you willing to use to do that? Those are really the 3 big components of grand strategy. I should add, it's not just threats, it's opportunities. So-

Justin: So it sounds like you're doing a strategic planning analysis of the US as opposed to an organization where I [crosstalk 00:18:56]-

John: Yes, yeah, and that's why I think grand strategy has a certain cachet in different circles because business people kind of, "Oh, I do strategy." Or university president, anybody that's been in a strategic role goes, "I kind of get this basic exercise."

Justin: So before we go to Trump, give me, if you can or if you don't mind or both of you, give me the grand strategy of say a different president to give me a point to think about how we can compare Trump. We can say either Bush, our school's namesake, or Obama, or 43. Whomever you're most comfortable with to kind of give me some organization thoughts that then we can turn around because I want to juxtapose that to see how that looks compared to the current administration.

John: Well, I'm trying to think of the presidents I've actually written on and speak with some credibility on it. So, I've written on Roosevelt, on Lyndon Johnson, and George W. Bush. I would say, George W. Bush, that's an easy one because at the time that they were kind of thinking through their grand strategy it was very controversial. And so there was just a lot of discussion of what are these folks up to? And granted, a lot of this is in the

context of the 9/11 attacks and how they react. But if you read the 2002 National Security Strategy, it's fairly explicit that the US needs to be dominant, no peers. The US will be better off over time the more democracies there are in the system, and, most controversially, the US has to be willing to strike first to deal with emerging threats like Al Qaeda.

John: But it was then extrapolated more broadly into a doctrine of preventative war. This is, we're not going to wait and sit around and see who hits us, we're going to hit them first. And, obviously, the concrete manifestation of this very controversial is the Iraq War. A good book on this is Hal Brand's On Grand Strategy. He basically on the long chapter on the Bush presidency says, "Oh, they had a grand strategy. It was just problematic." There are other presidency's where it's kind of hard to figure out what the grand strategy is. I think Clinton was a bit famous for this. Although,-

Gregory: I don't know. I'd argue that the Clinton Administration had a grand strategy of expanding the realm of democracies and it was based on a notion of democratic peace. To some extent in a way, the Bush 43 Administration was; although, the means for Clinton was dumping a lot of money into Russia and other countries to try to make them Democratic, right?

John: Fair, yeah. I actually should have said, Bush 41 is actually the one who's often criticized for not having a grand strategy.

Gregory: For not having a... right. At the end of the Cold War it was difficult. But, to me, and John is the expert on this, but to me, the kind of quintessential American grand strategy is containment, right? We pursued a policy with twists and turns and different interpretations, basically from 1947 to 1991 of containing the power of the Soviet Union and containing the spread of Communism as a governing ideology. And that was our grand strategy. We fought wars to do that, we fought a war in Korea to do that, we fought a war in Vietnam to do that. We spent billions of dollars and deployed hundreds of thousands of troops in Europe, in Korea, in Japan, in the Philippines. We built navies to be permanently on station in what for us is the Western Pacific and the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean in order to contain the military and political influences, and we built these nuclear weapons that could destroy the world to contain the influence of the Soviet Union. That was a grand strategy.

John: Yeah.

Gregory: And it persisted over a number of presidencies, it persisted over decades. It was the unifying principle of American foreign policy. And then there were debates. Do you have to fight in Vietnam to contain the Soviet Union? But no one really questioned that we had to contain the Soviet Union.

John: To be fair, because it is relevant to the Trump discussion, our own Chris Layne, I highly recommend this book, Peace of Illusions, he has a different argument, which is basically from 1945 on to today the US has pursued one grand strategy: liberal hegemony. Which is basically containment for him is a bit of a side show. The goal is basically then to

dominate, not just the Western Hemisphere, but the globe and to do so in order to make the rest of the world liberal so that the US basically just doesn't have to deal with geopolitics anymore, right? If everybody looks like us. Now, I would say-

Gregory: How'd that work out?

John: Well, it's interesting because this over time more and more realists, in particular, have converged on this view. That if there's a unifying theme to American grand strategy, certainly after the end of the Cold War and maybe before, it's this. That we were overly focused on the Soviet threat and we're missing the fact that the US just wanted to dominate for other reasons and this explains why the US has been so active after the Cold War. Because there's this big puzzle, if containment was the goal in the Cold War and the Soviet Union goes away, why does none of the grand strategy go away?

Gregory: Right. Why do we still have those fleets in all of these places?

John: Right, exactly. And Layne and others, I think, and I would also say the defenders of that grand strategy agree with Layne, they just put a different normative spin. Like, "yes, we have wanted to dominate, but that's because remember the battle days? World War I and World War II? Do you want to run that experiment again? No. Let's replace anarchy and power politics with American dominance."

Gregory: And institutions, right?

John: Yes. They're for everybody.

Gregory: There's a variant of realism that actually respects institutions, right? There's power underlining these institutions, but you build institutions. Economic institutions based on relatively open trading systems and a dollar dominated world financial system, right?

John: Yeah.

Gregory: And you build these institutions, which are underlain by American power, as a realist would say, without American power these institutions fall apart. And you build these institutions and you maintain your military power in order to make the world friendly for you and better for everybody else, right?

John: Yeah.

Gregory: I'm an American, I'm here to help you.

John: And this explains, I think, why so many people-

Gregory: That was a joke, by the way.

John: It's what's allowed many of the people on the doing grand strategy as opposed to arguing about it. It allows you to feel good about what you're doing because, yes, the US

is dominant, but nobody wants to return to the days of competition and war. And so, it's essentially we've domesticated international politics, which is very consistent with a realist analysis.

Gregory: Although, Iraqis might disagree.

John: Well, and this has been the pushback that what appears to be liberal order providing to those doing it, feels an awful lot like war and massacre to those on the other end. But, anyway, it depends again on what normative spin you put on it.

Justin: So, okay, I think I have grand strategy can be a couple things. It can be an overarching kind of narrative like containment as a main policy, can maybe also be thought about from a particular administration's overall strategy, overall narratives within their administration and their approach. So, let's get to today. And one of the things that we said a minute ago was that some presidents have more of a clear tie in to a grand strategy than others, maybe Bush 41 was over criticized for not having a grand strategy. How do we think of the Trump grand strategy? Is there one? And then, it seems to be different than sort of this pursuit of say, liberal hegemony.

John: Yeah.

Justin: So maybe if there is one, it's different than what it's looked like in the kind of general way that the American establishment has thought about these narratives. So is there a Trump grand strategy to both of you, but let's start with our guest, and if so, what does it look like?

John: That's a good question. I think to the unpleasant surprise of a lot of Washington, Trump has stuck with certain ideas he came into office a lot longer than, I think, folks thought he would.

Gregory: [inaudible 00:28:36] the pity. But, go ahead.

John: This a good, by the way, political lesson that when it's hard to change a president's stripes, they're not going to learn in office. They kind of know the way they think the world works and being elected president is not going to lead you to revisit your core beliefs. Now, what are those ideas? I think Trump, interestingly, might be the first, and I'm going to use my words carefully, illiberal president we've elected in the sense that he openly subscribes to illiberal notions of how the international system works and hence what the American national interest is. And this is why I think he's so controversial.

Gregory: And by liberal, you're not talking about kind of the way we talk about liberal and conservative now. You're talking about kind of fundamental liberal, open trade, spread of democracy, those kinds of small liberal beliefs that have animated in one way or another every American president.

John: Yes.

Gregory: Even if some of it was lip service, they basically thought that these were good things.

John: Yes. So for example, he has a very hard time accepting that cooperation can be win-win. There's got to be a winner and a loser and if you're not winning, you're losing and that means you're a sucker. The whole point of the liberal world view is that we all benefit. If you're enlightened enough in your self interests, if you give a little today you'll gain a lot tomorrow. And so you have to play the long game and stick with cooperation even when it's inconvenient and he just doesn't see things that way. The other point I would make is that he really is capable of moral equivalence, which drives people nuts. So these famous quotes of, "Russia you've interfered in elections, we've interfered in elections, what's the difference?" Or, "Yes, you've killed people. We've killed people."-

Gregory: Putin kills people, do you think we're so innocent? Yeah.

John: Yeah and now, again, this is troubling to many folks, but this is quite unusual for a president to not kind of subscribe to the basic liberal variety of American exceptionalism. And, again, I would return to the fact that I think there was a sense that he could be reigned in a bit by the people around him and he's [crosstalk 00:31:03]-

Gregory: I think they've all resigned.

John: Yes.

Gregory: Mr. Tillerson, General Mattis, General McMaster, General Kelly. Interesting so many generals in that.

John: Yes.

Gregory: Who've all left and he's still standing.

John: And why do you think he surrounds himself with these, because he venerated strength, but a certain kind of strength, manly strength. But then he discovers that the actual generals that he's talking to don't really see the world the way he does and it irks him because to them they're kind of just walking embodiments of strength. And I do think he has coherent views and I think some of them are sounder than others, but he is a great subject for this analysis because he doesn't look like, or talk like, the other presidents. And it's not just his lack of government or whatever experience, his beliefs are so different from the norm.

Gregory: Right. So it's trade, the liberal, American-built liberal order was based on a notion that trade is good. Trade is win-win. We want to expand the realm of international trade. He doesn't like that. Democracy, he doesn't really care.

John: Indifferent, yeah.

Gregory: Right. Plenty of president's have gotten on with autocrats just fine. He seems to enjoy it to a level that most presidents... but it's not just that, it's also the denigration of Democratic allies.

John: Oh, I think the key one is alliances.

Gregory: Right. He believes that alliances are free riders on American power and the fact that our core alliances, not the ones in the Middle East, but Japan, South Korea, and NATO, that although these alliances are with democratic states, this is harming the United States because these smaller countries are just taking advantage of us.

John: Yeah, he doesn't see the... This is a key litmus test issue, if there's anything that the prevailing, call it what you will, liberal hegemonic American grand strategy was built on, it was this notion of the inherent value of these core alliances. Because it was these core alliances that basically allowed the US to project power and influence into these key regions, but in a way that didn't require a lot of muscle flexing. We are there on behalf of the Germans and the Japanese, these are our core allies and we're providing security to these regions so that these states don't have to do it for themselves. And if they have to do it for themselves, we're going to rerun the 20th Century again with all-

Gregory: The last time all the Germans and the Japanese thought they had to supply security for themselves-

John: Not good.

Gregory: The story didn't end happily.

John: And Trump just says, "I don't get this. What are we getting out of providing security for these people? Why aren't they paying? Pay up." Because he just simply doesn't define the national interest in the way, I hate to use this word, the establishment tends to do. And that's why he drives them nuts.

Gregory: But don't you think that he also has a notion, in terms of grand strategy, that China's the big problem and we need Russia on our side against China?

John: That's probably giving him a little too much credit, but-

Gregory: Really? It seems pretty simple.

John: See, we haven't quite gotten... Yes, if you give him the benefit of the doubt. Steve Bannon-

Gregory: Why else would he be as obsequious toward Russia as he is?

John: I don't know. Well, there-

Gregory: It's not the Pee Tape.

- John: Business interest? But I don't-
- Gregory: It's not Trump Tower Moscow, it's not the Pee Tape, it's not Putin having something on him. I think he fundamentally sees China as the problem and Germany's not going to help us, we need a big country to help us. So he sees Russia as a place that he's willing to cultivate to an extent that no other American politician is willing to.
- John: I think that's the probably spin you can put. And this gets to a bigger issue, which is for any realist like me, Trump has some good instincts we'd say, and even says the right thing on occasion and then the execution is something to behold. And-
- Gregory: Give me an example where he said the right thing.
- John: I think it's valuable for him, how do I put this? To encourage a debate about the value of alliances. I think that-
- Gregory: Every president has done that. He's-
- John: Not a public debate. He's going after the heart of the issue. This is not about... Usually the way it's done is 10 affirmations about valuable NATO alliances and then behind closed doors, "You guys better pay up more." And that's a bit of what I cover in the article I wrote with Josh Shifrinson.
- Gregory: Who?
- John: My former colleague.
- Gregory: Our former colleague.
- Justin: [crosstalk 00:36:31]
- Gregory: Our former colleague, Josh Shifrinson.
- Justin: Oh, we miss him.
- John: But Trump just says out loud, "What are we getting out?" This is an [inaudible 00:36:39]. You don't say things like that.
- Gregory: Now, he's trying to slay the sacred cows. There's no question about that.
- John: And his critics, I think, will kind of say, "There's no strategy there. He is just myopic and he doesn't get the value of these alliances and these institutions." And if there is a strategic case, it's yours, which you're making. Which is, no, he got at an early point how zero sum things are with another rising power like China and he and Steve Bannon were willing to do the kind of painful things, like fight an economic war with them, that the liberals can't be trusted to do because they're all hooked on this notion that we all win. Right? Through trade and...

Justin: How much of it sometimes seems like the actual overriding strategy is just anti the what the previous president did? What every thing that Obama was for-

Gregory: That's not a grand strategy.

John: No.

Justin: [crosstalk 00:37:37] like warmer relationships with China, now more tense with China. Bad with relationships with Russia, now trying to have better relationships with Russia. Iran Deal, Paris Accords, everything feels like from a international engagement, friendly with Europe, whatever it is, it seems like it's just anti what the previous president [inaudible 00:37:57].

John: I'd love to hear Greg's take on this because I think that applies best to the Middle East because whenever he's had a sound instinct on something, when it comes to the Middle East, there's nothing... No realist I know of would have supported withdrawing from the JC, the agreement with Iran that cap [crosstalk 00:38:17]-

Gregory: Nuclear. Yeah, the Iran nuclear deal.

John: No realist I can think of would support being one sided in support for Israel, the Saudis, and that group of allies. Basically taking their side in intra-regional dispute with Iran.

Gregory: But a lot of realists would support not confronting Iran after Iran attack the Saudi oil facilities.

John: There are some, yes. And so this is one of the most-

Gregory: I think I'm sitting next to one.

John: Yeah, we yelled at each other about that in the hallway.

Gregory: Yeah.

John: But one of the most interesting things about Trump that we're seeing over and over is he really doesn't... Hillary Clinton was very comfortable with using the stick. Madeleine Albright, all these liberal multilateralists could live with war at the end of the day. Trump faces the reality and shies away. He goes, "Wait a minute. This might kill 150 people? I-"

Gregory: He talks tough, but he doesn't want to fight wars.

John: It's very interesting and a bit of aggression, I guess. But I do think in the Middle East that is where I would say the anti-Obama instinct is rearing it's head. But Greg might have a different take on it.

Gregory: No, I think that he has a grand strategic notion of the Middle East, which is we're not going to fight anymore wars there. But President Obama had that notion as well and he

got sucked in. He made a choice to enter war in Libya, he returned to Syria and Iraq with the rise of ISIS. Not in the full-scale war, but we were engaged militarily. We were bombing and we had troops on the ground in these places. The interesting thing about Trump is that while he and Obama had that same fundamental, "The Middle East isn't that important and we shouldn't be engaged in wars there" Obama couldn't get out. Obama's strategy was make a deal with Iran and try to get out.

John: Yeah, yeah.

Gregory: Trump's strategy is, "I don't want to fight wars in the Middle East, but, boy, I'm going to be tough on Iran." And that's the fundamental tension for him is you're going to be tough on Iran because you think the Iranians are either going to collapse, the regimes going to fall, or they're going to surrender and come to the table and give you a much, much better deal than they gave Obama. And it was an analytical malpractice, if you will. Trump never realized that the Iranian's had a third option, which was make life really difficult for the US. But that's getting a little too much into the Middle East, don't you think, Justin?

Justin: From the Middle East expert I expect no less.

Gregory: Yeah.

Justin: I've been learning about the Middle East for a long time from you now, Greg.

Gregory: Yeah.

John: Likewise.

Justin: All right, so thank you, John.

John: Thank you.

Justin: And since we skipped out on questions last time, we've left a little bit of extra time this week and we have a really nice sized crowd this week, so thank you all for-

Gregory: Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people.

Justin: Hundreds and hundreds of individual cells that showed up to, okay, sorry. Bad natural science joke. Not even pity laughs. Okay, so what we'd like is any questions from you either about topics today, just in general other things you've heard from the podcast, things you'd like to ask us.

Gregory: What does this has to do with impeachment?

Justin: Impeachment again if you didn't get enough of that in the last episode, there has been some things that have happened since then. So if you will just kind of raise your hand

and I'll recognize you and then repeat your question to the microphone and we'll address it.

Gregory: Not all at once now. The number of hands that have been raised, it's beyond counting.

Justin: Yes?

Speaker 4: Dr. Schuessler, does the Security and Defense Strategy reflect the President's actions or is there a divergence between what's written and what's taken place?

John: I-

Gregory: So the question is, the Trump Administration like every administration develops a National Security Strategy, it publishes it. I think we can all pretty much assume that President Trump never read a word of the National Security Strategy and so, do these words mean anything?

John: I think historians will look at those documents as an artifact of an early stage in the administration where certain advisors were able to get out ahead of the President and put certain things in writing that I don't think reflected his views.

Gregory: The emphasis on alliances and the strategy.

John: Yeah, and this is why they were met with a fair amount of contentment by those that were worried about the new departure that Trump might represent. The problem was, he didn't change his stripes. So, I think, the one important, most substantive shift that you'll see in those documents that I think will have some staying power is this focus on great power politics. So says the realist. But I do think this is something that McMaster really was the one in charge, it was his aide Nadia Schadlow, who I think wrote the actual document. This is something they definitely tried to emphasize that after 9/11 the focus was on the War on Terror and that's going to change when you have rising powers like a rising China and a resurgent Russia to deal with. And that, I think, is going to be enduring because that reflects something real. But the answer was given these threats, America needs to kind of double down a bit on firming up its alliances and "balancing" against these threats. And that really I don't think represented Trump's instincts. And now McMaster's gone and Schadlow's gone and Mattis is gone and we've already gone through the list.

Gregory: They're all gone.

John: I don't know if we'll see another National Security Strategy from this administration, but if it had been written by Steve Bannon, it would have been a different document and probably closer to what Trump actually believed. Good question.

Justin: Thank you. Yes?

Speaker 5: So, Dr. Gause, if Trump's strategic rational in cozening up to Russia is that the main issue is China and that's you need to do everything to deal with that issue, why behave in such a different manner with Iran than-

Gregory: So the question is if I'm right and President Trump's grand strategic view is very focused on China and so you bring Russia in, you try to be nice to Russia, why would you go out of your way to try to pressure Iran?

John: Yeah.

Gregory: Which has developed a decent relationship with Russia and would be a side issue on this, if you really wanted to focus on China. I think that there are a couple of reasons that have nothing to do with grand strategy. I think that the President came into office, and here's where this idea that anything Obama did was a bad idea, I think on Iran it really did take and there are a number of people on the Republican side who are Neoconservatives, a grand strategy that we dealt with earlier in the podcast in a somewhat peripheral way. But this is Neoconservativism raising its head, which is Iran is a major threat because it has an ideology that's counter to ours and it's threatening our one democratic ally in the Middle East, which is Israel. The Neocons are very pro-Israel. It's also threatening "our oil" in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, and that the Iranians have to be contained.

Gregory: So I think that it came together to some extent in the President's desire to be different from President Obama in his belief that a very pro-Israeli policy would garner support within the American Jewish Community and also, I think more importantly for the President, in the American Evangelical Christian Fundamentalist Christian Community, where support for Israel is extremely strong. And so since the government in Israel, the Netanyahu Government in Israel, campaigned openly against the Iran Nuclear Deal and was not shy in criticizing President Obama directly for the deal. I think that President Trump saw the Middle East more in the context of those political factors than in grand strategy.

John: And I should add, there's an element to Trump's thinking we haven't really talked about. Which he has a clash of civilization streak that you can also see in Steve Bannon's thinking. This is where his nativism comes from. And this manifests in different ways, but Islam he has views on... It's not irrelevant to this. I think unlike some of the other major geopolitical issues, he has certain views about the clash between the West and I think certain kinds of... I think that make it hard for him to reconcile his policy in this region with other parts of Is-

Gregory: Although, he embraced the Saudis. His first foreign trip was to Saudi Arabia and-

John: I know. I'm still not sure how to make sense of that.

Gregory: And I've got to tell you, they're Muslims.

John: I've heard, yeah.

- Justin: Have you been there?
- Gregory: Yeah, once or twice. But it brings it back to the immigration issue and all, I think that one could argue it's no accident that he sees the Chinese as a threat and the Russians as potential ally.
- John: Yeah, and this point that he's our first openly illiberal President, he is illiberal on these immigration and identity issues.
- Gregory: Right, exactly.
- John: And I don't think he would resist that label.
- Gregory: No.
- John: I'm a nationalist, here's what I mean.
- Speaker 6: So following that logic, why then if he wants Russia why then would he undermine his European allies?
- Gregory: Right. So the question is if the President wants Russia on the American side, why wouldn't you try to bring Russia in with NATO allies and kind of a European framework, which is to a great extent what our grand strategy was in the Post-Cold War period, maybe not under Bush 41, but certainly under Clinton and to some extent at the beginning under W. Bush, right? Who looked into Putin's eyes and saw his soul and saw that he was an okay guy. John?
- John: I think that's assuming a harmony of interests in Europe. That's part of the liberal view is that Europe whole and free. There's no reason for bickering here.
- Gregory: Because historically you've always gotten along so well.
- John: But let's say maybe Putin and Trump see the world in somewhat similar ways, which is there are big dogs and little dogs and the big dogs they deal directly with each other and deserve a little space and autonomy. I think this where is realism and Trump converge a bit. I don't think Trump is bothered by the notion that Russia deserves a sphere of influence of some kind. And a lot of realists are comfortable with that. That is totally inconsistent with a Europe whole and free. The whole part means no spheres of influence except for the United States gets one, all of Europe-
- Gregory: Yeah. Which is all of it.
- John: But nobody else. And, again-
- Gregory: We get a sphere. All of it.

John: All of it. But see, that's the tension though. So if your strategy for bringing Russia in is to deal directly with them as a kind of near peer, that's not consistent with, "We want you to be part of our sphere of influence in Europe."

Gregory: Right, right.

John: That's not going to work.

Gregory: And so when Russia goes into Ukraine and next is Crimea, I think Trump basically said, "Well, yeah. That's theirs."

John: That happened.

Gregory: "That's not something that would bother me that much." But Republicans pushed back on that enormously.

John: Yeah.

Gregory: In the same way you could see just in the last couple of days, Republicans pushing back on Trump's declaration after a nice conversation with Mr. Erdogan, the President of Turkey. "Oh, we're leaving Syria." It was Republicans as much as Democrats who pushed back on that.

John: Since it's come up now the Ukraine... it's painful for realists to see what's about to happen with the impeachment stuff and Ukraine because now it's going to become a sacrosanct position that if you promise military aid to a state, thou shalt not ever use that as leverage because that state deserves every dollar of that aid. They're a [inaudible 00:52:10]-

Gregory: Well, there's leverage to get far in policy goals and leverage to have an investigation of the Bidens.

John: And I see the difference. I'm just saying that this is why Trump is the worst messenger for realism. I don't have a problem with playing a bit of hardball with other states to kind of get your prerogatives secured. Yes, you shouldn't play hardball in order to smear an opponent. This is obvious to most people.

Gregory: Obvious to most.

John: Yeah, anyway.

Justin: Hashtag...

Gregory: Do we have one more before call it an evening? Not all at once now. In the back.

Speaker 7: Economic interdependence. How do you think the Trump Administration sees that and what are the limits of what he would do, not do?

Gregory: So economic interdependence, which we've been talking about in a liberal world order view is a great thing. You want more interdependence.

John: Yeah.

Gregory: More trade, more investment. Even if you're European Union, more labor moving across borders. We kind of know how the President feels about labor moving across borders.

John: Well, I think it's a great question because I think the liberal theory of victory over time is if everybody is getting rich, our reasons for bickering will decline. And if you start then viewing economic interdependence as fundamentally competitive phenomenon, as Trump does, that's directly in conflict with the liberal view of economic interdependence, which is we're all getting better off. And I think every grand strategist should be very interested in economic issue and economic statecraft because it does fit into the larger picture. I think this is one of the reasons Trump is a bit isolated in the grand strategic debate because, again, many people can get behind some of his ideas. Not many, some of us about alliances relations, etc. But even hardcore realists kind of recognize that the US has gotten really rich off of economic interdependence. It hasn't been good for every sector or every industry, but I think there's a real debate among realists over this question. And I'm surprised, I think to his credit, Chris Layne, was early in saying the US should be more mercantilist like Trump is. But I don't know how many even realists would subscribe to that. I think it's a real dividing issue.

Gregory: Although, one of the things that unites the President and two of the top three challengers on the Democratic side-

John: Yeah, that's fascinating.

Gregory: Senator Sanders and Senator Warren have a very skeptical view of the advantages of international trade.

John: It's really interesting.

Gregory: Bernie Sanders has been there for decades criticizing trade deals and Senator Warren's position on trade, quite frankly, I think is indistinguishable from President Trump's.

Justin: Yeah.

John: It's probably more protectionist.

Gregory: It might be more protectionist than President Trump.

John: And I say that with great respect for her-

Gregory: Right, right, right. And it might be more protectionist than President Trump. So I think that one of the core fundamental pillars of this international liberal order that American

grand strategy has tried to build, that one might be the one that is crumbling in terms of public support the most.

John: Yeah. To the horror of our economics colleagues.

Gregory: Well, to the horror of some people like me who like to drink French wine and Italian wine and who drive cars that at least some of the parts are made in Japan and who actually think NAFTA and the creation of a North American supply chain has actually been good for, on the whole, all three countries. Although, as you say, sectors, some sectors benefit more, and some sectors less.

Justin: We'll have to have Raymond Robertson back. We had him here for a whole episode to explain why trade is good.

Gregory: Right.

Justin: And he makes a very convincing argument, I think.

Gregory: Right. We'll have to invite Elizabeth Warren on the podcast to make the argument against.

Justin: Yeah, yeah. That'd be fun. I'd like to hear her argument.

Gregory: So, John, thanks so much.

John: Thank you. This was great.

Gregory: It was great fun.

Justin: And thanks so much to the audience for being here tonight.

Gregory: Thanks to everybody. Justin, what do we have next?

Justin: So our next recording will be on October 22nd, to remind everyone. We'll be here again in Historic Downtown Bryan at Downtown Uncorked recording live starting at 6PM.

Gregory: And who are our guests?

Justin: And our guests that week are Dr. Will Brown and Dr. Ellie Qu. And they will be with us talking about the Third Sector, the Non-Profit Sector, and Improving Outcomes for Society.

Gregory: And we'll ask them what that has to do with impeachment.

Justin: And grand strategy.

Gregory: Yeah.

Justin: Thank you so much.

John: Thank you.

Gregory: Thanks, everybody.