

23 January 2017

## President Trump's Inaugural Address

### *What and How*



**Charles Crawford CMG**, a communication and public speaking expert and a founding partner of *The Ambassador Partnership LLP*, analyses in this AP Insights the extent to which President Trump's Inaugural Address on 20 January 2017 did so.

Charles Crawford served as UK Ambassador to Poland (2003-2007); Serbia and Montenegro (2001-2003); and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996-1998). In 1987 he wrote the UK FCO's first *Guide to Speechwriting* and he has supported speeches by the British Royal Family and UK Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers. His book on leadership communication [Speeches for Leaders](#) was published last year when he also won a [Cicero Award](#) for his speech *Technology, Security, Freedom* delivered by Sir John Sawers (former Chief of MI6).

The inaugural address of a new US President typically answers two questions: *What* and *How*.

First, to set down unambiguous policy markers: to spell out in broad but more or less specific terms what the new President aims to achieve. And second, to set the 'tone' of the new Administration: to point up the style and energy defining how the new President and his team set about the challenges ahead.

President Trump's speech on 20 January weighed in at a brisk 1400 words – a full 1000 words shorter than President Obama's 2009 address. He had scarcely finished speaking before the Twitterati were denouncing the speech as 'dark' if not dangerous.

### **What's happening here?**

This Trump speech did not sound like something pored over by wily speechwriters and policy wonks. It had all the strengths and weaknesses of the Trump campaign itself, above all reckless energy and brutish directness in attacking the USA's 'establishment' by appealing over their heads to the 'little guy':

- The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country ... and while they celebrated in our nation's Capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land.
- That all changes – starting right here, and right now ... the forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer. Everyone is listening to you now.

THE  
AMBASSADOR  
PARTNERSHIP

---

**He then swung into his key message:**

- From this moment on, it's going to be America First. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families.
- We will seek friendship and goodwill with the nations of the world – but with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first ...
- We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones – and unite the civilized world against Radical Islamic Terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth.
- At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America, and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other...

**What should the rest of us around the world make of this?**

Modern global order is based on multitudinous rules and principles and a rich alphabet soup of international organisations developed since the Second World War: United Nations, NATO, ASEAN, EU, WTO, IAEA, ITU, OECD and so on.

The central underlying idea is that for all the often annoying and laborious features of this way of doing things, it's far better for all countries to work within this shared global framework than 'go it alone'. The USA has played a predominant role in setting up this system, from the Marshall Plan onwards. American leadership under successive Administrations has been expressed within it.

President Trump's 'America First' rhetoric sounds like a sharp break from that long tradition, in both *What* and *How*. It conveys frustrated impatience with key outcomes at home and abroad that the USA has achieved by the patient give-and-take of global diplomacy. Be it in national security, trade or migration, others have been prospering at the USA's expense:

- We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength ...

\* \* \* \* \*

The risk in all this is obvious. That *America First* surges off with the *UK First* of Brexit and encourages *Russia First*, *China First*, *Turkey First*, *Iran First*, *Germany First* and most other countries to see the planet as fixed cake of options and opportunities, with each country grabbing slices for itself. Without American steadiness in support of multilateralism as an end in itself, the political and moral logic of self-restraint for shared prosperity/security frays in favour of greedy *ad hoc* deals cut for fleeting advantage.

THE  
AMBASSADOR  
PARTNERSHIP

---

The new Administration's moves on Russia and the international sanctions against Moscow's Ukraine policies will be one key test. So will policy towards China, the Middle East, climate change and plenty of other key areas where the world has become used to Washington operating within reasonably predictable policy parameters.

Maybe it will not be like that. At least in foreign policy *America First* in practice turns out to be more about Tone than Substance. After some initial startling moves it settles down again as weary global realities make themselves felt. Trump officials are just more bloody-minded and cynical in pushing US positions in international fora than US officials usually are.

No-one knows, including (one suspects) President Trump himself. His march to the White House has been all about defying categories. His inaugural address projected angry energy in favour of a totally new course at home and abroad, but on both *What* and *How* he left himself plenty of room for manoeuvre.

For further information please contact:

**Tracey Stewart**

Business Development Manager

[tracey.stewart@ambassadorllp.com](mailto:tracey.stewart@ambassadorllp.com)