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## Wake Forest Hosts Cato Institute's Emma Ashford

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March 4, 2020

Concluding programming for its inaugural year, the Wake Forest International Security project sponsored Dr. Emma Ashford, a Research Fellow in Defense and Foreign Policy at the libertarian-leaning think tank the Cato Institute in Washington D.C. Titled “Can Donald Trump End America’s ‘Forever Wars’? The New Politics of Restraint,” Dr. Ashford took an approach to American foreign policy departing from Dr. Peter Feaver **earlier this semester**. The event was also co-sponsored by the Department of Politics & International Affairs, Office of the Provost, and the Eudaimonia Institute.

As a realist, Dr. Ashford hopes for a foreign policy that “reign[s] in the excesses” of American engagement in the post-Cold War era, wherein a “military posture” has marked the norm. Despite Donald Trump’s rhetoric on the campaign trail (and even in the White House) Ashford maintains that a restraint-based focus “has not at all what his record has been.” Citing troop surges in Africa, selling arms to Ukraine, and inflamed tensions through confrontation with Iran and North Korea, Ashford argued the President has done little to curb aggressive foreign policy consensus that go back to at least the George W. Bush era.

Attempting to move the conversation beyond simply presidential politics, Ashford took to explaining the redeeming value of restraint in an era where the establishment often criticizes it as an intellectual and political project. “Restraint is not isolationism,” she told the audience. Instead, it attempts to “move the goalposts” to a foreign policy where the reactive and standard policy is not military interventionism, “increasing diplomacy to offset” limiting forceful engagement. Seeing the middle east as the “poster child” for destabilization through military intervention, Ashford sees the current political moment as one where thinkers on national defense can pioneer new rhetoric and strategies for taking on world challenges; restraint could certainly play a role in this vacuum.

Interestingly, the new coalition for realism spans across political boundaries, according to Ashford. Given Trump’s rhetoric of ‘forever wars,’ and the anti-imperialist foreign policy of the progressive left, a space for common ground materializes for politicians that “basically don’t agree on anything else.” Beyond party politics, restraint is also “becoming more popular among the American public.” Citing electoral returns in counties with high casualties from Iraq and Afghanistan Wars going disproportionately towards President Trump in 2016, polling from the

Chicago on Global Affairs, and veteran activism she asserted that most Americans “increasingly believe in a shared leadership role...the unipolar moment is over.”

Ultimately the question then becomes to what extent balancing and restraint is necessary. The far more “divisive” questions of multilateralism, free trade, and Sino-American relations expose disagreements within the realist coalition, which combined with the view of to what extent we should rebalance, “are often the clearest indicator of how you view your end goals,” in foreign policy. What does this all mean for the future of American foreign policy? Ashford is optimistic for gradual restraint to take hold. She asserted “some mix of pragmatic engagement with offshore balancing” will materialize in the next decade, though it will be “likely...patchwork” and contingent on areas with failed American military presence.

Finally, the generational change of new leadership will accelerate this process. Given the proclivity of younger Americans to be more restraint-leaning, new heads of state may do more to change America from its primacist posture.

After these two talks from accomplished foreign policy thinkers with varying positions, the Wake Forest International Security Project will be unrolling a full suite programming in the Fall Semester of 2020.