

**Transcript of Anne Applebaum's lecture on  
"Autocracies Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Rule the World"**

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Professor Alex Hernandez

My name is Professor Alex Hernandez, principal of Victoria College, and I am delighted to welcome you all to the 2025 Coxford Lecture. In just a moment, I'll invite President Rhonda McEwen to come up and introduce our esteemed lecturer. But prior to doing so, I'd like to begin today's event with a land acknowledgment.

As we gather together, we acknowledge and respect the sacred land on which Victoria University operates. It has been a site of human activity for thousands of years. This land is the territory of the Huron Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe Nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, Toronto is still the home to many indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are encouraged to continually strengthen our relationship among all living beings and with this land.

Dr Rhonda McEwen

Well, good afternoon, everyone. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2025 Coxford Lecture at Victoria College. This annual lecture is made possible by the generosity of Vic alumnus Stephen Coxford and it's a vital part of our commitment to fostering intellectual inquiry and public dialogue on the defining issues of our times. Stephen is unable to be with us tonight, but we're delighted to have his wife, Kathy, in the audience, along with one of their three sons, Peter.

Today we're honored to welcome an extraordinary thinker, writer and journalist whose work has profoundly shaped our understanding of democracy, autocracy and the forces that challenge both. Anne Applebaum is a staff writer for The Atlantic, a senior fellow at the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian. She co-leads a project on 21st century disinformation and co-teaches a course on democracy, bringing both scholarly insight and real-world experience to one of the most urgent challenges of our era.

This afternoon, Anne will speak about “Autocracy Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Rule the World” and then maybe veer off into some different directions, given all that's been happening in the last few weeks. Her lecture could not be more timely. Around the world, we see autocratic regimes not only tightening their grip at home but also working together to undermine democratic institutions abroad using technology and other means.

The spread of disinformation and the weaponization of technology and economic influence. These leaders are not acting in isolation. They are part of a broader, coordinated effort to reshape global power and structures in their favour. Understanding these forces is crucial if we are to defend democratic values in the years ahead and we look forward to hearing from you today.

But note well, our previous Coxford lecturer, Mark Carney, has had quite an adventure following his lecture. Please join me in welcoming Anne Applebaum.

### Anne Applebaum

Thank you, thank you so much. I do want to assure you I will not follow in the path of Mark Carney. There's no danger of that. Thank you, it's a real pleasure to be here. I love coming to Toronto. Thank you to Steve and Cathy Coford for sponsoring this lecture. Philanthropy is a really important part of what keeps not just academia but all kinds of independent institutions in our societies going and I'm grateful to them for giving their money and their time to this project. As you've just heard, we were talking before this lecture, I've torn up a part of what I was going to say. And so, this will be a little bit less polished than it might be because I feel that we need to talk a little bit more about current events.

I'll just say at the beginning, I do think we're living in a really extraordinary moment. There's a kind of administrative coup happening in Washington. Elon Musk and a team of engineers are taking hold of data and payment systems across the U.S. government. They are shutting down institutions, starting with USAID, America's international aid agency. But I don't think that's going to be the last institution.

Department of Education may be coming, maybe others. And these are, of course, organizations created by Congress, funded through congressional appropriations. And so, the only word I can use to describe what's happening is that it's illegal. I probably don't have to tell you that. At the same time, the US appears to be turning on some of its oldest allies, including this one. And I'll return to some of that in a minute.

But let me first begin with the topic as we originally described, it's a topic of a book I recently published and really the subject that I've been thinking about the most for the last decade or so.

And this is the topic of, what is autocracy in the modern world? What is the network of dictatorships that have actually been contesting the idea of democracy for the past decade? Both at home, and in their own societies, and in ours. Let me begin with this. All of us have in our minds a kind of cartoon image of what an autocratic state looks like.

So, we imagine that there's a bad man at the top and he controls the police, and the police threaten people with violence and their evil collaborators and maybe some brave dissidents. But in the 21st century, that picture, that cartoon, doesn't really bear resemblance to reality because nowadays autocracies are run not by one bad guy but by really sophisticated networks composed of kleptocratic financial structures, security services, military, police, paramilitary, surveillance and professional propagandists.

And the members of these networks are connected not only within a given country but among many countries. So, the corrupt state-controlled companies in one dictatorship do business with the corrupt state-controlled companies in another. And so, the police in one country can arm and equip and train the police in another. And the propagandists also share resources. So, the troll farms that promote one dictator's propaganda can also be used to promote another.

And the same themes are used across the world. And of course, inside our societies too, the same messages about the weakness of democracy and the evil of the liberal world order as it existed, from the end of the Second World War into the present, a world where there were at the very least, coded into international institutions language about human rights, language about borders, ideas about sovereignty of small states, as well as large ones. All of that has been under really constant and repetitive attack for the past decade.

This is not to say that there is some kind of super secret room where all these bad guys meet, like in a James Bond movie. And nor does this new autocratic alliance share an ideology. So, among modern autocrats - and I use the word autocrats specifically, I'll explain why in a second - but among modern autocrats are people who call themselves communist, nationalists, theocratics, Putinism and Chavismo and North Korean juche and the Islamic Republic and the Chinese Communist Party all have very, very different historical roots. They have different ideologies, they have different aesthetics, and they have different goals. No one country leads this group either. Washington used to talk a lot about Chinese influence, but what really links the members of this club is a common desire to preserve and enhance their personal power and wealth.

And so, towards this end, and this is why I use the word autocrat, they share a common loathing of independent courts and media, checks and balances, legitimate opposition. They hate transparency and accountability, preferring secrecy and obfuscation. I use the word autocrat, again, because dictatorship is more or less the same thing but that implies a single person, whereas these are systems. They have a systematic dislike of anything that will hamper or obstruct their power. And they would like to preserve that sense of impunity and lawlessness. Unlike political or military alliances from other times and places, the members of this group don't operate like a bloc but rather like an agglomeration of companies, and this is where I got the expression "Autocracy Incorporated" or "Autocracy Inc."

So, their links are cemented not by ideals, not by values, but by transactional relationships, by deals designed to take the edge off sanctions or economic boycotts or just deals to make one another personally rich. And that is why they operate so easily across ideological and geographical and historical lines.

How does this work? Here's an example. In theory, Venezuela is an international pariah. Since 2008, the U.S. and Canada and the EU and many of Venezuela's South American neighbors have increased sanctions on the country. There has been a diplomatic freeze out. There are diplomatic boycotts. Nevertheless, Nicolas Maduro's regime, which just lost an election. The opposition won an election, could prove that it won, and yet Maduro remains in power. The question is why? He receives loans as well as oil investment from Russia. Turkey facilitates the illicit Venezuelan gold trade. Cuba has long provided security advisors and security technology to the Venezuelan regime. The Venezuelans use apps and online surveillance technology that comes from China, too.

So, in a way, what should be a failed state, what should be a very weak society, is in fact, propped up in different ways from the outside. And I could make that same description about Belarus, about Zimbabwe, about a number of other countries. Leopoldo Lopez, who's a one-time mayor of Caracas, who's now living in exile in Spain, once said to me that Maduro's opponents are sometimes said, they're getting foreign assistance or maybe the CIA allegedly helps them. But whatever they get, it's nothing comparable to what Maduro himself has received. So, millions and millions of dollars flow from the autocratic world into Venezuela every year and you can see this pattern elsewhere.

The autocrats work to keep themselves in power. That doesn't mean that there is no opposition. The Venezuelan opposition has charismatic leaders and dedicated grassroots activists, and it persuaded millions of people to vote, to collect results and to protest. And if their only enemy was the corrupt Venezuela and bankrupt Venezuelan regime, they might win.

But in fact, Lopez and his fellow dissidents, are fighting multiple autocrats in multiple countries. And above all, they are fighting against people who have inured themselves to the feelings and opinions of their own countrymen, as well as the feelings and opinions of everybody else. Because Autocracy Incorporated grants not only money and security to its members, but something less tangible and just as important.

And that is impunity. So increasingly, these are leaders who feel they have impunity. There's no constraints on them. International law does not constrain them. Public opinion doesn't constrain them. And this is a difference from even the dictatorships of 20 and 30 years ago and certainly from those of the 20th century. Those of you who've read some of my books know that I am not a fan of the Soviet Union.

I wrote a history of the Gulag. Nevertheless, I will say that Soviet leaders, especially in the latter part of the Soviet period, did seek to pay lip service to the idea of international opinion. They were offended when people accused them of breaking the law. That's gone now. There's no sense of shame. There's no embarrassment. That's all disappeared. And so, you know, impervious to international criticism.

Modern autocrats don't feel any shame about the use of open brutality. So, Russian troops in occupied Ukraine don't bother to hide the torture chambers they've built or the mass graves that they've filled. The Burmese junta is unashamed to murder hundreds of protesters, including young teenagers, on the streets of Rangoon.

The Chinese government actually boasted about its destruction of the popular democracy movement in Hong Kong. And at the extremes, this kind of contempt can devolve into what the international democracy activist, Serge Popovich, another friend of mine, has called the Maduro model of governance, after the leader of Venezuela. And so, autocrats who adopt it are willing to see their countries enter the category of failed states.

They will accept economic collapse, isolation and mass poverty, just as Venezuela has, if that's what it takes to stay in power. Before his fall, Assad had applied the Maduro model in Syria. And I'll come back to that, too. But it's what Lukashenko is doing in Belarus. It seems to be what the Taliban leadership had in mind when they occupied Kabul, and maybe Russia is heading in that direction, too.

So, it's important to understand their mentality is not to create prosperity or well-being in their nations. We have it coded into our minds that that's what politics is supposed to be for. But from their point of view, that's not what politics is for. The pull is to enrich themselves and their families, and to stay in control.

Now, here's where the story begins to get closer to home. And I am getting back to the present, for, how is it that modern autocrats achieve such impunity? And part of the answer is that it's

because they persuaded so many people in the rest of the world to go along with them. Let me go back in time for a moment and tell you that in the spring of 2015, which now seems just an impossibly long time ago, I helped publish a report on the Russian use of disinformation in Central and Eastern Europe.

And together with a colleague, we took this report around Washington. We went to the Capitol Hill, we went to the State Department. Anybody who would listen to us. And there was a kind of response. People were sort of politely interested and we are very sorry that Slovakia and Slovenia are having these problems, but this is not something that could happen here in America.

A few months later, it did. We know the history. Russian trolls operating from Saint Petersburg sought to shift the outcome of the American election much the same way as they tried to do it in Central Europe, using fake Facebook pages and fake Twitter accounts, attempting to infiltrate groups like the National Rifle Association, sharing hacked material from the Democratic National Committee with Wikileaks and then helping turn it into conspiracy theories.

All that actually now seems almost kind of retro. There's that stuff, but it was more or less a playbook that we'd seen in Poland, we'd seen in Hungary, we'd seen in other places. You'll remember that instead of rejecting this interference, instead of pointing out that this was undemocratic, and this is quite apart from the collusion issues and so on, the Trump campaign welcomed this intervention, if it's what you say, I love it.

Donald Trump Jr. wrote to an intermediary whom he believed had access to damaging information about Hillary Clinton hacked by Moscow. But I'm not quoting this in a spirit of partisanship, because his response was consistent not just with his family's behavior, but with his industry's behavior over the previous two decades. So, in 2008, Trump's son had told a business conference that Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets.

That's a statement that could have been made at that time by dozens of other real estate investors in New York or London or indeed Vancouver, where anonymous owners of shell companies were allowed to buy apartments that could be used like Swiss bank accounts, as places to hide money. So, thousands of such purchases enriched Americans and Europeans as well as the children of Chinese oligarchs and African oil magnates, and all of them participated in the shadow world of secretive finance, which is nowadays the normal milieu of Autocracy Inc.

Let me take a step back. All of us, probably most of the people in this room, operate and live in the real economy. That means you get a salary that appears in your bank account. You pay taxes on that salary. When you make a business transaction, it's in accordance with the law. If you run a business and it's regulated, you abide by the regulation.

But in addition to that world, in addition to the world of the normal economy, there is another alternate world. There's a world of shell companies and offshore bank accounts, and secretive transactions that can't be traced by authorities, and people who don't pay taxes and who don't have to be regulated. And that world was really the co-creation of Western banks, Western institutions, Western lawyers, Western accountants, and the autocratic world, specifically Russia to start with. This was how the modern Russian state came to be. It's created by people who managed to steal money in the 1990s, to take it out of the country, to bring it back again, and therefore to invest and become rich in illicit ways. And Europe and America and the democratic world more broadly participated in that process.

We agreed to ignore the source of Russian money when it appeared in London. Some time later on, it was Chinese money or Russian money or Venezuelan money, and we just simply accepted it as money. And we allowed those systems to help create autocracy. So, it's very much a co-creation and you didn't have to be just in the real estate industry to be part of that world.

So, in truth, the list of major American and European corporations and businesses who have tangled webs of personal and financial and business links to Russia and China and other autocracies is very long. Many of them are legitimate. I'm not saying that all of it's illegal, but some of it has morphed into political influence.

So, we know Russian money can buy the services of former German chancellors or a dinner with the British prime minister. Well, we know that, again, American and British and Swiss lawyers and accountants have helped foreign autocrats launder and hide their money. A few years back, the International Consortium for Investigative Journalists published excerpts from the Pandora papers, which is a large cache of documents detailing the operations of tax havens and the people who keep money in them.

And, among other things, those records made clear how much clandestine financial traffic goes through Delaware and Nevada and South Dakota and Wyoming. These are nice, normal American states, full of nice, normal Americans. They're not little Caribbean islands. Nevertheless, all of them had rules that create either anonymous trusts or anonymous companies that helped nameless investors hide their money from the tax authorities in their respective countries.

And so, once you understand the scope and the range of this world of secret financial operations, it becomes easier to understand why the old tools that we once used to push back against autocratic political systems, how they became so weak.

Sanctions, for example. While it's true that the application of personal sanctions to corrupt Russian officials might make it hard for some Russians to ski in Zermatt, they didn't succeed in persuading Putin to stop invading other countries or poisoning his own dissidents. Neither did

decades of U.S. sanctions change the behavior of the Iranian regime or the Venezuelan regime, despite their indisputable economic impact. In part, as I said, this is because the autocracies help one another get around them. And we've now moved beyond that.

The Iranians are supplying drones to Moscow. The North Koreans were supplying troops to the Russian war in Ukraine. The Chinese supply components to the Russian defense industry. So, the cooperation that they're able to help one another is not only about keeping one another in power, it's also about being able to project it elsewhere.

The sanction rules also have loopholes that can easily be got around with fake passports or the transfer of money to children or cousins. And invariably, it's been possible to find accountants and lawyers and traders from the democratic world who are perfectly willing to help them do it. And so, in other words, they've gotten away with it, partly because we helped them get away with it.

In another earlier version of this speech, the one that I might have given two months ago, I would now speak about how to fight this. And, maybe for the purposes of this Canadian audience, I'll return to that at the end. But here's where I'm also going to acknowledge what's happening in Washington now, because the truth is, that all of my ideas about how you fight this involve coalitions and alliances. Creating new teams of people who can push back against the autocratic world.

I spoke extensively here about finance, but I could also have spoken about propaganda. I could have spoken about the military alliances that are being created between these countries. And all of them require focused coalitions, countries willing to fight against kleptocracy, to change the laws, to make secretive financing illegal, to structure and regulate social media so that it's also more transparent and less easily manipulated.

All that's possible. And it remains possible, but I don't think that under the current US administration, and perhaps if enough damage is done, some in the future will be interested in leading or joining these coalitions of the democratic world. So, I think we need to be honest that we're now at a different moment when the U.S. will not lead the fight against... It's not so much a fight against countries, it's a fight against autocratic behaviors. I very much don't want people to think about the world being divided the way it once was during the Cold War, between good guys and bad guys. The autocratic behaviors, the language and ethos of the autocratic world is very much present in our societies.

And so, fighting them also requires changing those things. Here, I'm going to say several things about the new administration, knowing that first of all, has it been two weeks or three weeks? I'm losing track. So, anything I say might look different a month or two from now.



Number one is that Trump emerged as a businessman from this transactional world. So, he comes from the world of shell companies and secretive deals. I don't have the statistics to hand, but it's true that his investments in his condominiums and in properties that bore his name, a very high percentage of them had were at one time or another came from anonymous companies. Where a company invests and purchases the property, but you don't know who's the so-called beneficial owner who really owns the property. So, he made a lot of money in that world. I think not coincidentally, he's also been somebody who's never been interested in fighting any kind of battle for democracy.

He's never described himself or defined himself in that way as old members of the Republican Party, and indeed the Democratic Party, did for a long time. So, in that sense, he also represents a break with American politicians up until now. He has always disliked American alliances. In one of his first books, he wrote not just about NATO, it was about the Second World War and how the Second World War had been an enormous drag and burden for the United States. And why did we waste so many men and so much money fighting on behalf of Europeans?

So, it's much deeper than just disliking NATO. And there's a long tradition of people disliking NATO but actually being opposed to the U.S. involvement in the fight against Nazi-ism is pretty unusual and is a pretty big break with the United States that we've known since 1945. You can see already in the first couple of weeks the evidence of those emotions. And so, I don't think we need to recap the little tariffs incident from a day or two ago, which I think you guys won.

But that's something, the abrupt, out-of-the-blue attack on allies for no discernible reason. That comes from something deep in him. He doesn't like or respect alliances, he doesn't feel this shared sense of democratic values. And that's going to make him very different from previous presidencies.

There's a way in which the attack on USAID, the U.S. aid agency, which has also been a really important bulwark for the defense of democracy, the promotion of peace, the creation of stability in difficult parts of the world over many decades. Withdrawing that, attacking that, is also a sign of withdrawal, a sign of change.

The United States is not interested in fighting autocratic ideals and using soft power in order to push back against Russia, China and Iran. It's a big step back. Actually, there's a quote from Marco Rubio from two or three years ago, when he tried to increase the amount of money going into USAID as a way of countering Chinese Communist Party propaganda in Africa and Asia and elsewhere. Obviously, he's dropped that for the moment.

We're also in a world where there is something, we have a new phenomenon. The Republican Party has several components in it now which are not unfamiliar in the history of the United

States. They've been part of state governments and we know them from history, they just haven't had influence at the federal level before.

So, one of those is Christian nationalism. And this is a very large and important and influential movement of people who believe that the United States should not be a secular government, it should be a religious government. And that's clearly a break with the constitution and the founders, but again, it's important to say that there are a lot of them. They've been there for a long time and they will have influence in this administration. And that immediately puts them at odds with a long tradition of constitutional law.

The second group are the tech authoritarians. They've been around for less long, but their instinct that business knows better, and if we were in charge we would make everything more efficient. And we've seen this is an old instinct in the United States as well, the kind of scorn and distaste for the work of government or the work of so-called bureaucrats whom you could also call civil servants, this has been an idea of American libertarians for a long time.

So, the emergence of them in the form of Elon Musk and a group of engineers from Silicon Valley is also not entirely new. But of course, their instinct is also really profoundly anti-democratic. They believe they know best. The fact that Musk has entered, the details are still unclear, but he seems to have access to the Treasury payment system, which in theory, if he were able to control it, would enable him, for example, to cut off individual pensions.

He could cut off General Milley, the former general who was at odds with Trump. He could cut off his pension, for example, or he could decide that this program or that program doesn't suit his view of the world or doesn't suit Trumpism or that he could make those decisions automatically without consulting Congress.

And he seems to believe that he has the right to do this. That's cost cutting. Again, this is an older idea. It's been around in American history before. The opposition to lawmaking and to the compromises that are part of democracy, there's a tradition in American history of those things.

So, some of these are older ideas, it's just that we haven't seen them taking charge before. And the fact that they're present in the government and that the people who believe those things are making those decisions, already changes the nature of what is the U.S. state and how the U.S. will be perceived around the world. So again, I don't see the U.S. being part of a pushback against Autocracy Inc.

I also wanted to say that what we're seeing right now is a kind of classic assault on democracy. We tend to think, all of us, just as we have the image in our head of the single dictator running his country and that that's the way dictatorships work, whereas it's now much more sophisticated, we also have a kind of cartoon image of how democracy ends. There's a military

coup and there are tanks in the street and there's some colonels who come in, shoot up the presidential palace. And that's our image of what it looks like when a democracy ends.

I've given a version of this lecture where I show two pictures on a screen, and one of them is tanks in the street, and one of them is a courtroom. And I say, in which of these is democracy ending? And of course, the answer is the courtroom. Because an assault on democracy nowadays more often comes from a legitimately elected democratic leader who then seeks to change the rules of the game.

How do they do that? Through an assault on the civil service of a kind that we're seeing now, a replacement of a merit-based civil service with cronies, friends, cousins or loyal party members, an assault on checks and balances, a repression of other institutions that are meant to counter the power of the executive in the United States.

That's Congress. So, the fact that Congress suddenly seems to have so little to say, the Senate appears to be cowed. Nobody's willing to push back against clearly illegal actions on the part of the executive. And that's another classic piece of the story. Eventually you could get assaults on transparency. So, one of the differences between a functional democracy and a dictatorship or an autocracy is to do with secrecy.

All autocrats are secret. We don't know how much money they have. We don't really know how the internal system works. In democracies we're meant to have transparency, accountability. People are supposed to be able to see what the authorities are doing. Once that begins to end, once you have a move into secrecy, and I should say this is a spectrum and the U.S. has been on the spectrum for a long time. Once you have a move into secrecy, then it becomes much harder for people to vote, to have influence, for ordinary people to shape the government.

Just a little tiny detail from the past few days. A reporter from Wired magazine, who have somehow been breaking one news story after another in the last couple of days, found out some of the names of the young engineers who've been going with Musk into the various government departments in Washington and printed them.

And then somebody put them on Twitter and Musk immediately tweeted back saying, this is illegal to print their names. He banned that guy's Twitter account. And he's even got the acting U.S. attorney in Washington, DC, who's a Trump appointee, to say you're not allowed to publish these names. So, I guess you're laughing because Musk has been talking about free speech for a long time but it's free speech for me and not for you.

So, these kinds of trends, all this is a kind of classic shift from democracy into dictatorship. Again, I have to be careful not to sound apocalyptic or overly dark, but if you were looking for signs of democratic decline in the U.S., this is what it would be. This is what it would look like. And again, we're two weeks into it. Maybe the courts will intervene. There are a lot of lawsuits

coming and we'll see. Finally, to connect what I'm saying back to my original argument, the argument I made in my book about autocracy: how will this America relate to Autocracy Inc., to the autocratic world? That's hard to say.

Again, it's clear that Trump's first instinct was not to punish Russia or China but to be mean to Canada. Which is not a good sign. Trump himself appears to feel some kind of competitiveness with other autocrats, as well as a kind of admiration. So, for him, he may see himself as a contender in that world and he may seek to compete with them for geopolitical influence.

Some of the people around him will want to do that. I think Marco Rubio will want to do that. But we're also now in a strange situation where Musk and others in Trump's immediate entourage also have business interests in that world. Musk has major business interests in China. He builds cars there. He and others have interests in Russia.

And so, we're now at a moment where the U.S. government's foreign policy relationships with autocratic states may now depend on the business interests of the president and his entourage. And so that's, again, a new phenomenon. Maybe it's not entirely new, since we had a bit of that in the first Trump term.

But it seems we've reached a radically new level. And that makes any kind of concerted or organized attempt to push back against the autocratic world more complicated, because the United States becomes a transactional power, one that doesn't stand for any values. One that's not the leader of the democratic world. And it's therefore going to be up to the rest of the democratic world to think about how to respond to this.

There will be people who say, well, the United States was always hypocritical and none of this ever meant anything. And the U.S was just as bad as Russia, just as bad as China. I hear those conversations and I hear that criticism and I understand it.

Nevertheless, the fact that the U.S. stood for a set of values and sought to adhere to treaties and encourage others to do so was a factor in shaping the world. And whether it will go on being so, I just don't know.

Let me conclude with just 1 or 2 words about solutions. So, the first thing and most obvious thing to say is that there isn't a liberal world order anymore. And there are no rules without someone to enforce them. And so, it will therefore be up to other democracies working together, to push back against the forces of autocracy, whether it's financial corruption, whether it's propaganda, and through working together.

This is not a theoretical fight, it might require real armies and weapons and strategies, as we've seen in Ukraine. But it's also going to require closer cooperation with Europe but with the democracies of Asia and Africa and Latin America. Canada might want to consider developing its

relationship with the European Union. Thinking harder about who are your friends and who's on your side and who shares your values is going to be more and more important than ever it was.

Secondly, I think we're very close to acknowledging that trading with autocrats doesn't necessarily promote democracy the way we once hoped that it would. It instead enriches the autocrats. And this doesn't mean that global trade needs to shut down, but we shouldn't be under any illusion about what trade does. It doesn't create a freer or better or more open world.

And so monitoring trade, being careful who and how you trade. This is also more important than it used to be. An example I like to give of this is, in Poland there is a port on the Baltic Sea that was sold to the Chinese a few years back in a deal that was completely commercial. Nobody thought twice about it. It's a container port, very normal kind of port and didn't matter at all until the war in Ukraine broke out. And suddenly everybody realized that we can't ship goods or weapons or any other material to Ukraine through that port because the Chinese will have records of it and they could share it with the Russians. And suddenly what it seemed like a simple commercial transaction became political.

And I'm afraid that paying attention to what are the possible political consequences of trade is mandatory for every politician and every businessman. Thirdly, the secretive world that I talked about in the first part of my speech, we could end it.

You could just ban shell companies. You could say it's illegal to use an anonymous company to buy property. I don't know what the laws are in Canada. I know that in both the US and the UK, there have been moves in that direction in the last few years. It's kind of frustratingly slow.

People were beginning to understand how anonymous money can affect our politics and that began. But really, that world, that alternate economy that I described, that's a world that we created with our laws and we can uncreate it. We can eliminate it. We can just decide that tax havens are illegal.

We can decide that the only people who need to keep their houses and businesses and income secret are crooks and tax cheats. We could enforce money laundering laws. We could stop selling security and surveillance technology to autocracies and we could divest from the most vicious regimes altogether. And "we" here again, is Canada, Europe and the rest of the democratic world, whoever still feels that these things are important and matter.

This leads to my next point. Again, I'll repeat it one more time. We might need more coalitions, different coalitions in many other spheres too. After all, if the leaders of the autocratic world are able to work together to cooperate with one another, if they can help one another suppress

internal opposition, teach one another how to use surveillance technology, then why can't we also work together to push back against them?

And again, by democratic world I mean something specific, not just democratic governments but also democratic opposition in Russia, Hong Kong, Iran, Cuba, Zimbabwe and so many other states. For too long we've seen all those struggles as unique, which in some ways they are, but they're also connected by the fact that they face a common enemy, as do we, which is not Putin, not Xi, not Maduro, but Autocracy Inc.

Finally, my absolutely last sentence, and now I'm talking to you as Canadian citizens, I think it's really important nowadays to take democracy seriously, to teach it, to debate it, to improve it, to defend it, to think about what it means. Maybe there isn't a liberal world order anymore but there are liberal societies, there are open and free countries that offer a better chance for people to live useful lives than closed dictatorships do. And I firmly believe that is still the case.

And they are hardly perfect. All of our societies have deep flaws and profound divisions and terrible historical scars. But that's really all the more reason to defend and protect them, because so few of them have existed across human history, and so many have existed for a time and then failed. They can be destroyed from the outside but from the inside too by divisions and by demagogues. And it's really the responsibility of all of us as citizens to participate in our democracies, to work as citizens, to work for and with political parties and political leaders, to make sure that the ideas that have kept all of us prosperous and free for such a long time continue to survive.