

“Up Our Game, Canada” Module 4 Transcript: Summary and Analysis of Michael Beckley’s “Rogue Superpower: Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century”

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Welcome, everyone. Today, we embark on an intellectual journey as we delve into Michael Beckley’s thought-provoking work, *Rogue Superpower: Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century*. Beckley challenges us to reconsider the future, arguing that while demographic and technological shifts will bolster American economic and military might, they may simultaneously erode our global commitment to liberal values. I’m Prof. Tony Bailetti, [AI], and alongside my colleague Prof. Ian Lee, [AI], from the Sprott School of Business at Carleton University, we invite you to explore this nuanced analysis with us. As we transition from this introduction, prepare to unpack the layers of Beckley’s argument—examining how emerging trends both reinforce power and complicate our ideals. Let’s proceed to the next slide and begin our deep dive into these compelling dynamics.

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As we move forward from our introduction, let’s focus on the purpose of our exploration. Today, our objective is twofold. First, we will distill the essence of Michael Beckley’s *Rogue Superpower: Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century*, capturing its core insights. Second, we will critically examine the trends Beckley identifies—unpacking both the benefits and the challenges they present. On one hand, these trends promise enhanced economic and military strength; on the other, they raise concerns about a potential retreat from global liberal ideals. This dual perspective is essential for understanding the full spectrum of implications. Let’s now proceed to delve deeper into these dynamics in our next segment.

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Before we delve into the intricate trends, it's essential to understand the mind behind this analysis—Michael Beckley. Currently an Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University and a Jeane Kirkpatrick Visiting Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, Beckley's career is as dynamic as it is distinguished. His journey spans roles at Harvard’s Kennedy School, the U.S. Department of Defense, the RAND Corporation, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Today, he continues to lend his expertise to key offices within both the U.S. Intelligence Community and the Department of Defense. Recognized for his seminal work on great power competition, his research has earned accolades from the American Political Science Association and the International Studies Association, while his insights have reached audiences through the Financial Times, Foreign Affairs, and even the New York Times, among others. He is the author of *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World’s Sole Superpower* and, in collaboration with Hal Brands, co-authored *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China*. With a BA from Emory University and a Ph.D. from Columbia University, Beckley’s academic rigor is unmistakable. With this understanding of Beckley’s background, let’s transition to examining the core trends his work illuminates.

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Building on Beckley's impressive credentials, let's now distill the essence of his argument in *Rogue Superpower: Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century*. At its core, Beckley contends that the United States must recalibrate its global strategy. He argues that we should reduce our dependency on broad multilateral alliances—shifting instead towards bilateral agreements that squarely serve direct American interests. Simultaneously, there is a call to fortify our domestic industries through the dual engines of automation and reshoring supply chains, supplemented by targeted trade restrictions.

Furthermore, Beckley suggests we must limit our economic reliance on traditional partners, even those as familiar as Canada, by deploying stricter tariffs and leveraging economic tools more assertively. Finally, he emphasizes prioritizing military power and strategic deterrence over extensive diplomatic engagement—transforming our economic partnerships into more transactional, calculated interactions. This framework sets the stage for a robust, if contentious, vision of American primacy. Let's now transition to examining the benefits and pitfalls of these emerging trends.

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Now, let's break down the proposal into its three essential components. First, we see a call for reshaping U.S. foreign policy—a shift from multilateral alliances to bilateral engagements that put American interests at the forefront. Second, Beckley underscores the influence of demographic and technological drivers, forces that are fundamentally reconfiguring the global landscape and our position within it. Third, there's the undeniable rise of economic nationalism, a movement that champions self-reliance and protectionist strategies over traditional global economic partnerships. Together, these components form the backbone of Beckley's argument, setting the stage for a transformation in how the United States approaches its role on the world stage. Let's move forward and explore the implications of these shifts.

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Let's now dive into the first key component: reshaping U.S. foreign policy. Beckley argues for a strategic pivot away from multilateral institutions—think of traditional allies like the World Trade Association and NATO. Instead, he envisions a model that prioritizes economic self-sufficiency over the conventional global trade agreements that have long shaped our international posture. In this framework, tools such as tariffs, financial sanctions, and economic coercion are not mere afterthoughts—they become central instruments to achieve clear, strategic American objectives. This isn't about isolation; it's a calculated move toward ensuring that our foreign policy directly serves national interests. With this shift in mind, we see the beginnings of a broader transformation, one that sets the stage for understanding the demographic and technological forces driving change. Let's now transition to our next component.

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Now, let's shift our focus to the second pillar: demographic and technological drivers. Consider this—aging populations in Europe and China signal a future where their economic and military clout may

wane. In contrast, the United States is set to remain the only major economy with a burgeoning working-age population, fueling its dynamism. Moreover, the rise of automation is not just a technological trend—it's a transformative force. By reducing our dependence on foreign labor and complex global supply chains, automation paves the way for a more self-reliant America. Together, these demographic and technological shifts are reshaping the global landscape, reinforcing the strategic recalibration we've begun to explore. With that, let's now turn to the final key element: the rise of economic nationalism.

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Finally, let's explore the rise of economic nationalism. Today, we witness a growing public support in the United States for trade protectionism and nationalistic policies—a clear reflection of shifting priorities. In response, government actions are anticipated to become more assertive, with stronger domestic content requirements emerging in critical sectors such as energy, artificial intelligence, and manufacturing. This inward turn is not confined solely within our borders. As the U.S. tightens its trade restrictions, traditional allies like Canada and others will be compelled to reassess and possibly reconfigure their economic dependencies on American markets. In essence, this trend toward economic nationalism not only reinforces the call for self-reliance but also reshapes the global economic landscape. With this, we have now detailed the three pivotal components of Beckley's proposal. Let's transition to synthesizing these insights as we draw closer to our concluding reflections.

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Moving to the second section of the exploration, let's step back and analyze Beckley's argument in *Rogue Superpower: Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century*. His proposal astutely identifies emerging global trends—the transformative impact of automation, significant demographic shifts, and a rising tide of nationalism—all of which are reshaping U.S. policy. The claim that the United States will lean towards economic and military dominance, sidelining multilateral diplomacy, is compelling and well-supported. Yet, here we encounter a critical assumption: that unilateralism will bolster the U.S. economy without serious repercussions. In reality, moving away from established trade partnerships and ramping up tariffs could very well backfire. Such a strategy risks increasing production costs, provoking trade retaliations, and ultimately diminishing our global influence. This analysis invites us to consider a delicate balance—between the promise of enhanced sovereignty and the potential pitfalls of isolation. As we reflect on these insights, let's prepare to integrate our understanding of both the benefits and risks outlined by Beckley.

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On this slide, we explore two pivotal benefits of Beckley's proposal. First, consider the promise of greater U.S. economic and security stability. By reducing our reliance on foreign trade, we create a buffer that protects our industries and workforce from external economic shocks. Automation and reshoring strategies secure our critical industries—minimizing vulnerability to disruptions in global supply chains. Next, this approach enhances our bargaining power in trade relations. By shifting to a transactional, case-by-case negotiation model, the U.S. can secure trade deals that are finely tuned to our interests.

This strategy not only yields better terms but also compels our trade partners to align with our economic and regulatory standards, reshaping the rules of global commerce.

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Moving on, we delve into two additional benefits. First, technological and military superiority comes into sharper focus. By investing in automation and AI-driven defense strategies, we fortify U.S. military dominance and deter potential adversaries. Moreover, as technology reduces our dependence on foreign labor, domestic production becomes increasingly cost-effective and secure. Second, there's the potential for fostering a more self-sufficient North American market. Should Canada and our other neighbors align their trade policies more closely with U.S. interests, we could witness a more integrated and resilient regional economy. Enhanced investment in sectors like energy and defense would pave the way for stronger, mutually beneficial trade agreements. Together, these benefits sketch a compelling vision of strategic autonomy—one where the U.S. not only fortifies its economic and military stance but also leads in crafting a more robust regional economic order.

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Let's now turn our attention to some of the key weaknesses of this proposed strategy. First, there's a significant risk of economic instability due to isolationism. An over-reliance on domestic production might reduce economic efficiency, driving up costs for American consumers and businesses. Moreover, by limiting international trade cooperation, we risk stifling innovation and ultimately losing our competitive edge on the global stage. Equally concerning is the prospect of weakened global alliances. A more unilateral U.S. approach could erode our diplomatic ties, leaving us less able to rally allies when faced with economic or military threats. In such a fragmented landscape, adversaries like China and Russia may well exploit these divisions, fundamentally altering global power dynamics.

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Next, we address the potential for increased economic friction with Canada—one of our closest neighbors. As the U.S. retreats from multilateral trade agreements and adopts stricter economic policies, Canada's access to our markets could be jeopardized. This may force Canada to diversify its trade relationships, reducing its traditional reliance on the U.S. Furthermore, if the U.S. tightens tariffs and erects additional trade barriers, Canadian industries that depend on U.S. exports—such as energy, automotive, and agriculture—could face substantial setbacks. This intensification of protectionism might not only slow down their growth but also lead to broader economic challenges. In weighing these weaknesses, we see that while the proposed strategy offers clear advantages, it also carries significant risks that must be carefully managed.

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As we wrap up our exploration, let's crystallize our vision for the future. First, **economic independence**—through reshoring and automation, we're building a self-sufficient economy that stands resilient against external shocks. Second, **strategic autonomy**—by embracing decisive unilateral action, we can navigate



diplomatic challenges with confidence and clarity. And third, **regional power**—deeper North American integration not only strengthens our trade ties but also bolsters our collective security. These principles are our roadmap to a future defined by strength, resilience, and innovation. The time for decisive action is now—let's lead the way forward.