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Foundations of the US-led Liberal International Order:  
From the ‘Rise to Globalism’ to ‘America First’

Abstract

In this lecture, Parmar argues that corporate foundations – like Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller, among others – have played a significant but neglected or misunderstood role in the rise and development of American power. He argues that despite their cuddly public image and claims of benign support for democracy, human rights, development and freedom, such institutions are locked into the strategic heartlands of American elite power at home and its imperial global projects. Combining an historical analysis with the rise of China and politics of the Trump phenomenon, this lecture suggests that elite power-knowledge networks centred on influential American foundations, but which extend to think tanks, both main political parties, major universities, the federal executive, mass media and international organisations, built the political-intellectual infrastructure for American globalism, and defeated or incorporated and domesticated challengers from Left and Right at home and from the global south and emerging powers abroad. With the rise of the Trump phenomenon, the major institutions and networks of US-led world order feared for the future yet, up to now, the indications are that those key elite power-knowledge networks will largely constrain the ‘radical’ America First agenda of the populist Trump and attempt to further perpetuate American global power.