



JEFFREY PRESCOTT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION

NationalJournal

Life in Brief

Hometown: Wichita, KS

Current Residence: Washington, DC Metro Area

Education:

- BA, Boston University, 1993
- JD, Yale Law School, 1997

Work History:

- Executive Director, National Security Action, 2018-Present
- Strategic Consultant, Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, 2017-Present
- Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Gulf States; National Security Council, 2015-17
- Deputy National Security Advisor to Vice President Biden, 2013-15
- Special Advisor for Asian Affairs to Vice President Biden, 2011-13
- White House Fellow, 2010-11
- Deputy Director and Senior Research Scholar, The China Law Center at Yale Law School, 2002-10
- Robert Bernstein Fellow, Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights, 1998-2001
- Clerk for Judge Walter Stapleton, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, 1997-98

Quick Summary

A former Obama Administration official leading an advocacy organization opposed to President Trump's foreign policy, Prescott is a quiet and highly-competent national security operator

- Human rights-focused lawyer with 6+ years of experience in the Obama White House
- After initially advising Vice President Biden on East Asia policy, transitioned to work on Middle East policy for the National Security Council
- Closely connected with Vice President Biden through his time in the White House and work with the Penn Biden Center
- Helped manage the U.S. response to the emergence of ISIS and negotiations over the Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)
- Unlike his National Security Action colleagues Ben Rhodes and Jake Sullivan, has a limited public profile and rarely appears in the media—instead provides narrow public analysis on issues
- Limited public commentary has sharply criticized the Trump Administration's unilateral foreign policy and advocated more engagement with the international community

Approach and Motivations

Prescott's public comments have advocated a return to US-led multilateralism to confront issues such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, and human rights

- In several commentary articles, Prescott has criticized President Trump's approach to foreign policy, calling it chaotic and disorganized, and argued for cooperation with international partners to achieve strategic goals

Policy Positions and Areas of Focus

Prescott's public commentary has focused on US-led global engagement, realist policy for the Middle East, and promoting human rights and transparency.

Multilateral Leadership – *Has opposed Trump's unilateralism and advocated a return to US-led international cooperation*

- National Security Action criticizes the Trump administration for isolating the United States and abandoning allies
- The organization specifically promotes "restoring American leadership" as a key goal by promoting American values overseas and engaging in diplomacy
- In a 2017 article, Prescott criticized the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Climate Accord, calling it an abdication of American leadership

Realist Foreign Policy in Middle East – *Argued for realist policies to deter adversaries and maintain stability in the region*

- As a White House official, Prescott worked on policy for the Iran nuclear deal and the approach the rise of ISIS
- In a 2017 article, Prescott urged Senators to apply pressure to Iran to deter malign behavior but to remain committed to the nuclear deal as a vehicle for cooperation
- Following the 2017 capture of Mosul from ISIS, Prescott recommended nuanced approaches for transitioning to provide sustained governance in Iraq

Human Rights and Government Transparency – *Focused on human rights and government transparency from the start of his career*

- Prescott argued in a 2018 article that the US Intelligence Community should publish its assessment on the death of Jamal Khashoggi
- In his early career, Prescott supported human rights lawyers and advocates at the Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights

Core Communities

Prescott associates most closely with Democratic foreign policy officials, particularly former members of the Obama administration and those affiliated with former Vice President Joe Biden

National Security Action – *Exists to counter the Trump administration approach to foreign policy*

- Ben Rhodes, Co-Chair, Former Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications
- Jake Sullivan, Co-Chair, Former National Security Advisor to Vice President Biden
- Ned Price, Director of Policy and Communications, Former NSC spokesperson

Penn Biden Center – *Biden's center serves as an academic think tank for foreign policy and a holding tank for future Democratic officials*

- Ariana Berengaut, Director of Programs, Partnerships, and Strategic Planning, former Speechwriter to Antony Blinken
- Michael Carpenter, Senior Director, former foreign policy advisor to Vice President Biden
- Colin Kahl, Strategic Consultant, former National Security Advisor to Vice President Biden

Foreign Policy's Shadow Government Contributors – *Group of former Obama administration officials provides commentary in opposition to Trump's foreign policy*

- Derek Chollet, Executive Vice President at the German Marshall Fund
- Julianne Smith, Director of the Asia and Geopolitics Programs at the German Marshall Fund

Selected Publications

Prescott publishes online written commentary on international issues regularly, usually as a member of Foreign Policy's "Shadow Government" team. His commentary typically focuses on Middle East policy

- ["Trump Doesn't Deserve Any Credit For His Disruptive Foreign Policy,"](#) Foreign Policy, March 2019
- ["Declassify the Khashoggi Assessment,"](#) Just Security, December 2018
- ["Here's What the Senate Should Ask Mike Pompeo,"](#) Foreign Policy, April 2018
- ["How Iraq War Hawks Can Help Stop Trump From Going To War With Iran,"](#) The New Yorker, September 2017
- ["Why Abandoning Paris Is a Disaster for America,"](#) Foreign Policy, June 2017
- ["Dear Senators: Push Back Against Iran, but Not at the Expense of the Nuclear Deal,"](#) Foreign Policy, March 2017
- ["Will Trump Scuttle the Success of Retaking Mosul,"](#) Foreign Policy, March 2017

Financial Disclosures and Donors

Prescott has provided political donations to former members of the Obama administration

- \$500, Dan for Colorado (Dan Baer—an Obama State Department official), 2019
- \$250, Biden for President, 2019

Media Appearances

Prescott rarely appears in public speeches or media, but occasionally publishes written policy commentary

TV – Very limited appearances discussing tailored security issues

- [PBS](#): "Security, Nationalism, and the Four Freedoms," October 2018

Profiles Other Have Written

Given his low profile, tends to be covered in profiles of National Security Action

Rebecca Savransky, ["Former Obama officials launch advocacy group aimed at Trump's foreign policy,"](#) The Hill, February 2018

- Summarizing the founding of National Security Action

["China Law Center's Jeff Prescott Named 2010-11 White House Fellow,"](#) Yale News, June 2010

- Alumni post announcing Prescott's selection as a White House Fellow

Info From Formative Years

In Prescott's early career, he focused on defending human rights around the world

- From 1998 to 2001, Prescott worked as a fellow and staff attorney at the Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights (now Human Right's First)
- At the Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights, Prescott helped found the Rights Defenders Program to support lawyers and rights advocates at risk around the world.
- While at Yale, Prescott founded the Beijing office of the China Law Center—which focuses on legal reforms in China
- In China, Prescott taught human rights as a visiting professor at the Fudan University in Shanghai. He is also fluent in Mandarin Chinese