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A U.S. GRAND STRATEGY FOR A VALUES-DRIVEN FOREIGN POLICY

KATE KIZER

"Might it not be that a great force that has always been thinking in terms of human needs, and that always will think in terms of human needs, has not been mobilized?"

–Jeanette Rankin

he 2016 presidential election was an earthquake for Washington's foreign policy establishment. Donald Trump defeated a slew of candidates who sought to maintain the bipartisan consensus on the United States' role in the world. Astonishment quickly turned to defense of the so-called rules-based international order, that many had believed would continue to organize the world in perpetuity following the Cold War.

Yet Trump, a wannabe strongman, has had no qualms exposing his disdain for human rights and international norms that have purportedly guided American decisionmaking on the world stage since World War II. As a result, his presidency has exposed significant weaknesses in the international and domestic institutions supporting the U.S.-led world order and the folly of defending a system whose weaknesses helped fuel his rise to power.

For better or worse, the past two years of Trump's presidency have created an opportunity for a significant course correction in U.S. foreign policy. It is time for a bold reimagining of the United States' role in the world based on an honest, unparalleled analysis of U.S. conduct since the end of the Cold War. It will not be enough to attempt to return to business as usual. This pivotal moment requires the United States to put forth a vision for overseas engagement rooted in values-driven principles. Such an approach would allow the U.S. to truly work in solidarity with those seeking a more peaceful and just world.

The "Benign" Hegemony of U.S. Leadership

In 1991, the U.S. emerged victorious in the Cold War, which had long exacerbated conflict in remote parts of the world as the United States and Soviet Union competed for influence. This competition drove the United States to try to stop the spread of communism at seemingly any cost – whether through the forced installation of friendly (often military) dictatorships or through wars of attrition against communist insurgencies. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States maintained a drive for military superiority and influence, believing that remaining the world's sole superpower was a strategic imperative.

The consensus view that U.S. military superiority helped it prevail over the Soviet Union codified the belief that U.S. security depended on its military dominance over potential rivals. Ground wars and air campaigns were supplemented with a series of alliances, foreign military bases, security cooperation and assistance, and patrols, to prevent the rise of another great power. The United States maintained a spheres-of-influence mentality, as it sought diplomatic and military alliances with regional powers to increase its influence over the foreign policy decisions of countries around the world. Countries under U.S. "tutelage" would receive economic and military benefits through beneficial trade agreements, military assistance, or political legitimation through the stationing of U.S. troops. The underlying assumption of this grand strategy, called primacy,1 was that the United States' role as sole superpower meant managing, and in essence controlling, world affairs.

U.S. military power was seen as immutable and was employed to remake the world in the United States' image. According to this worldview, the spread of democratization, economic development based in free-market capitalism and unfettered international commerce, and human rights would foster stability. Doing so would uphold the U.S.-led order that, in turn, bolstered the power of the United States.

There appear to be few specific articulations of U.S. national interests outside maintaining the United States' hegemony over world affairs. As American security and prosperity relied on global dominance, the United States believed it had an exceptional right to intervene in world affairs to maintain stability. Any failures to keep the peace were a result of external aggression to the U.S.-led system, rather than systemic limits on U.S. military power to control events in a multicausal world.

It is important to consider that this preference for stability may have had the opposite of the intended effect, that the military approach taken to protect U.S. hegemony may have undermined the economic power of the United States while exposing it to more adversaries, that U.S. actions inconsistent with its stated values of freedom and human rights or the inconsistent application of those values have undermined U.S. credibility as a beacon of them, and that the desire for such control actually has made the United States, the American people, and the world less safe.

Failures of Primacy

The United States' predominant reliance on military intervention to secure its interests has had a deleterious, and in some cases outright disastrous,² effect on the stability of the rules-based international order. The United States' desire for hegemony caused it to take on the role of "world police" during Republican and Democratic administrations alike. As a result, there has been a dramatic increase in U.S. military interventions around the world. Despite the various humanitarian reasons given for those interventions, the reality remains that the United States repeatedly has intervened militarily to protect hegemony over the international order.

The overemphasis on the use of force, however, has led to the decline of the very system it seeks to uphold. The greatest failure of U.S. primacy has been the preventative war framework adopted following the September 11, 2001, attacks - a framework that has engulfed the United States in a seemingly endless global war with ill-defined objectives. Rather than merely retaliating for the 9/11 attacks, the United States reverted to a geographically unlimited conflict against an ideology. Wars often became nation-building exercises that quickly expanded to new venues as extremist violence spread. Nearly 18 years later, the United States "combats terrorism"³ in 80 countries, with active bombing campaigns in seven countries, U.S. troops in combat in 14 countries, and 40 foreign military bases (for counterterrorism purposes) around the world – all at the cost of nearly \$6 trillion.⁴

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Primacy is wholly inadequate to address the causes of extremist violence, which has led to an overblown threat perception: Every *potential* threat is a problem that only can be addressed by the use of military force. This strategy does not uphold an international world system that values human life, human rights, and international law. It merely advances an Americanized view of security that remains obsessed with eradicating any threat to U.S. power, no matter its form. While extremist violence remains a security challenge - particularly to the people in the countries where the United States is at war - it does not pose an existential threat to the U.S. homeland.⁵ Yet 17 years later, the post-9/11 wars have expanded, rather than limited, extremist groups' reach, particularly online, while the number of groups has grown exponentially over the last two decades.

This approach to securing U.S. power has had a devastating effect on people around the world and in the United States. Approximately 500,000 people have died as a result of U.S. military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan alone.⁶ At home, the post-9/11 wars have exacerbated Islamophobia, anti-Muslim hate, and empowered white supremacist movements. The growth of the national security state has subjected Americans to mass surveillance and other civil liberty violations. The state of perpetual war since 9/11 has caused Pentagon spending to reach some of the highest levels in U.S. history constituting by far the highest portion of federal discretionary spending, with nearly half of the Pentagon's budget going to defense contractors, and little left over to invest in domestic priorities. This reality further undermines the idea that the United States is acting to uphold a rules-based international order that values human rights for all.

Despite the ever-growing evidence that military intervention cannot create democracy nor undermine the spread of extremist violence, there is no serious debate of this strategy in Washington. U.S. foreign policy makers on both sides of the aisle continue to assume that military superiority will allow the U.S. to prevail over extremist violence and rising great-power competitors alike. This assumption justifies clinging to a failed system of military alliances and security structures that gives the veneer of multilateralism, but is in reality a facade for escalatory U.S. unilateralism that benefits elite and corporate financial interests, while ignoring collective security threats like climate change.

Redefining National Interests for a Multipolar World

A new approach is necessary to adapt to the current and future strategic landscape. The challenges of the multipolar world are many, and they are interconnected: China's rising economic prowess that challenges American control of the world's economy, extremist violence that undermines people's safety and the rule of law, control of the world's wealth by a small group of elites and the challenge posed by a growing global authoritarian axis that fuels corruption and seeks to prevent the realization of human rights. The common thread is that these challenges cannot be addressed through the use of military force.

A renewed assessment of U.S. national interests in the world must come from the values that the United States aspires to represent. The United States has by no means fully fulfilled or upheld the aspirational ideals envisioned by the founders of this country in practice. Yet it should remain the goal to realize these values for all Americans, and to facilitate the reali-

U.S. policy makers must define national interests on the basis of upholding aspirational U.S. values, namely safety, solidarity, self-determination, equality, and justice for all.

zation of those same values around the world. There is no one-size-fits-all grand strategy that will apply to every part of the world in which the United States engages, or every security challenge it faces. Rather, U.S. policy makers must define national interests on the basis of upholding aspirational U.S. values, namely safety, solidarity, self-determination, equality, and justice for all.

While suggesting that values could drive U.S. national security decisionmaking in practice may seem idealistic, such skepticism fails to recognize the tipping point the world faces. The United States can no longer maintain its power by imposing its interests on other people around the world. The realpolitik approach to maintaining U.S. dominance has veered too far from moral considerations and exposed that acting without such considerations actually undermines U.S. power. Any redefinition of national interests therefore must end this dissonance and reckon with the fact that the dysfunction of today indicates the need for a radical reformation of the status quo. Reforms that merely tinker with the current system will not put the United States at the forefront of positive change in the world.

A New Approach to U.S. Engagement in the World: A Values-Driven Foreign Policy

Five values-driven principles should undergird U.S. engagement in the world:

Safety

Building safety in U.S. foreign policy starts with recognizing that all people have the right to safety, as Americans do. Actions that make others less safe are inappropriate responses to the American perception of insecurity. Building safety in the United States requires building collective security for all of humanity. It means acting to secure not only the American people, but also acting in ways that build sustainable human security around the world. Reconceptualizing American security must begin with an abandonment of the militarization of U.S. foreign policy and a reorientation of national security spending to prioritize human needs at home and abroad.

The United States first must end its role as the world's largest purveyor of violence and stop waging wars around the world that force people to flee their homes and that harm the most vulnerable in society. It must end the post-9/11 wars, along with the wars on immigrants and drugs. These wars only militarize U.S. communities and other societies, disproportionately target people of color, and contribute to the United States having the highest rate of incarceration per capita.⁷ Comprehensive U.S. immigration reform, which should welcome refugees, immigrants, and families seeking a better life, is also essential to realizing safety both for Americans and for people around the world. In doing so, the United States can reorient security spending from industries that profit from human suffering to investments in peace building, conflict prevention, climate security, mental health, community policing, and skills training, all of which address human needs at home and around the world.

BUILDING COLLECTIVE SAFETY

The United States remains in a unique position to lead the world in addressing collective security threats such as climate change and nuclear weapons. Both Democratic and Republican administrations have successfully moved⁸ toward reducing⁹ the spread¹⁰ and number¹¹ of nuclear weapons. The United States should seek to build on this legacy of making the world safer by adopting a No First Use policy, re-entering the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), maintaining the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty, extending the New START agreement, and canceling both the recapitalization of every facet of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and the proposed new classes of nuclear weapons.

On climate change, the United States can and should lead on the bold solutions necessary within the next 12 years to prevent the most catastrophic effects of climate change from being realized.¹² The United States must address its role in climate insecurity by implementing a

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ten-year mobilization plan to reorient the U.S. economy toward renewable energy and sustainable development.¹³ This stimulus to the economy would build economic security at home while also putting the United States in a position to lead on implementing the bold, multilateral initiatives necessary to build environmental and human security globally.

BUILDING SAFETY BY REORIENTING SECURITY ASSISTANCE

Building safety also requires a comprehensive, inclusive approach to political and economic development abroad. The United States must reconceptualize and reprioritize its foreign assistance. It should get out of the business of building foreign militaries in the image of the U.S. military – an unattainable goal¹⁴ that often subordinates the will of these countries' citizens to the military¹⁵ and can embroil the United States in gross human rights violations.¹⁶ Instead, security assistance and cooperation should have clear metrics and be limited in scope, such as focusing on building the rule-of-law capacities of police forces and militaries. Such assistance must be offered only on the basis of effective implementation of political and economic benchmarks, as well as guaranteeing non-governmental organizations' unfettered access to foreign aid. Any military equipment transfers must include more robust pre-vetting and end-use restrictions to prevent misuse. Overall, the United States should reorient the majority of its security assistance to stabilization and conflict prevention that focuses on increasing local capacity for locally led peace building, entrepreneurship, community organizing, and economic empowerment initiatives.

SAFETY AS A POLICY METRIC

Safety provides a useful metric, a principle that would require U.S. foreign policy practitioners to consider if a policy actually will make the people of the subject country safer or if there are better tools that the United States can employ toward that end. It requires the United States to end current policies that vilify

> or dehumanize others, or use coercion or force to create safety. It requires policymakers to ask whether saber-rattling rhetoric or economic sanctions will positively change the behavior of a foreign government, or if it will cause the ruling party to hoard resources and take actions that harm its own people. Sometimes this principle

will mean playing a facilitating role to other nations or actors, sometimes it will be mean playing a partnership role, and sometimes it will mean playing a leadership role. Overall, however, it will mean U.S. actions help build collective safety around the world.

Solidarity

Acting in solidarity with people around the world rather than imposing the interests of the United States would be a strategic shift for U.S. foreign policy. For too long, the United States has acted with either disregard or ignorance of local contexts and local drivers to conflict. This shortsighted approach has relied sometimes on aligning with and bolstering repressive governments. As a result, U.S. actions effectively have harmed local reform efforts or, at best, undermined them, resulting in anti-American sentiment and the loss of U.S. credibility on human rights. If the United States is truly interested in advancing human rights, justice, and self-determination for all, the best way to do so is by acting in support of communities around the world working to win systemic change in their societies.

Rather than taking action without consideration of the desires of peoples in other countries, the

United States should prioritize expanding the scope of its engagement in the world from the government level to the societal level to ensure its policies support the needs of local communities. U.S. diplomacy then must focus on engagement with a broad set of local stakeholders, including local civil society, community organizers, youth, and women leaders, who are the engines for change within their societies. U.S. diplomatic engagement also must seek to establish connections between U.S. grassroots movements and others around the world to facilitate coordination to achieve mutual goals of dignity, liberation, and self-determination. This approach will require a significant expansion of the diplomatic corps to a much greater extent than just returning to previous levels of investment in the foreign and civil service that Trump has gutted.

ACTING IN SOLIDARITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Solidarity requires a more consultative approach to align U.S. policy with the rights and needs of people in countries around the world. Backing inherently unstable authoritarian regimes that repress their own people and violate human rights in the Middle East, for example, has allowed military alliances to trump local aspirations for governance and economic reforms. Rather than acting in solidarity with people in the region, U.S. actions have exacerbated civilian harm and aggravated these societies' fragility. The experience of the Obama administration during the 2011 Arab uprisings shows the limits of lofty rhetoric¹⁷ without a reorientation of U.S. interests in the region.¹⁸ So long as U.S. policy focuses on establishing a top-down model of security and development, it will continue to undermine people's right to self-determination and the U.S. ability to play a constructive role for change.

Continued reform movements in the region,¹⁹ however, present an opportunity for the United States to reorient its policies to support the goals of people, not authoritarian governments. This would require an expansion of U.S. diplomatic engagement with nongovernmental actors and other members of the international community to facilitate negotiations between the people and their governments. The United States should use its various levers for influence, including diplomatic statements and accountability for the bilateral relationship, to push governments to meaningfully engage and create accountability for atrocities committed. Rather than seeking regime change, this would ensure the United States acts in solidarity with the people and in support of the values it always has claimed to support.

SOLIDARITY AS A POLICY METRIC

Solidarity provides a useful metric for policymakers to determine whether U.S. actions would undermine or support the desires of local populations. This metric would require policy makers to determine whether they have engaged a broad cross-section of society working for change outside the government, and conduct an analysis as to whether U.S. action, whatever its form, will not harm and instead support the desire of the public. This will not always mean that the United States takes the desired action some members of these societies will ask for – for example, helping to overthrow governments through the use of force – but it will ensure that any U.S. action centers the voices of those most affected by U.S. decisionmaking.

Self-determination

Supporting self-determination for all will require the United States to support other governments' decisions that fulfill the needs and desires of their own people. It will require the United States to listen more and dictate less in bilateral and multilateral relationships. By understanding that the aspirations of other people may not align with immediate U.S. priorities, upholding this principle supports democratization around the world. It is also an essential component of building safety for others by allowing people to determine how best to fulfill the human needs of their own societies. By focusing policy outcomes on upholding local communities' right to self-determination, the United States can help dismantle systems of oppression, such as white supremacy, economic exploitation, racism, patriarchy, and colonialism, that prevent economic and political inclusion.

UPHOLDING SELF-DETERMINATION IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Support for international development is essential to supporting self-determination for all. The United States must focus international development initiatives on prioritizing locally led initiatives that serve local needs. The current administrative burden placed upon recipients of U.S. development aid prevents small, local (often rural) partners from receiving grants – actors who often know the most about local development needs and are critical to building local institutional capacity. The United States should seek to eliminate this level of bureaucratic burden as much as possible by providing flexible funding for local community foundations.²⁰ Such foundations are able to take on the administrative and legal burden for local implementers and empower the local community to identify local solutions for conflict mitigation, political reconciliation, and social and economic empowerment. With sufficient anti-corruption controls, this will help ensure that U.S. development assistance around the world addresses the needs of disproportionately marginalized populations, such as women and indigenous people, and allows these groups to lead the implementation of solutions.

UPHOLDING SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE KOREAN PEOPLE

While Washington's rhetoric acknowledges people's right to self-determination, it is not necessarily upheld in practice. Washington, for example, has largely ignored South Korean President Moon Jae-in's efforts to seek peace on the Korean Peninsula. Moon is acting in South Korea's security interests, in recognition that a war, first and foremost, would harm the Korean people. The mass popular support for his efforts to achieve inter-Korean reconciliation only underscore the fact that Moon is acting in the interest of his own people. Yet Washington has resisted steps toward peace without North Korea's unilateral disarmament, and has expressed repeated concerns that Moon's diplomacy will harm U.S. security and play into North Korea's supposed goal of undermining the bilateral alliance.²¹

What this criticism misses, however, is that by failing to align U.S. interests with the popular will of the Korean people, the United States could be the one undermining its alliance with South Korea. To truly support the self-determination of the Korean people, U.S. policymakers should recognize instead that the South's approach to peace and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula could address the United States' security interests in restricting North Korea's nuclear program. Following South Korea's lead by putting peace and denuclearization on equal footing could strengthen the U.S. bilateral relationship and support the self-determination of the Korean people. By achieving a comprehensive peace deal that secures the eventual disarmament and increased economic development of North Korea, the U.S. also could help the North Korean people achieve better human rights and self-determination by facilitating the liberalization of North Korean society in the long term.

SELF-DETERMINATION AS A POLICY METRIC

The principle of self-determination can serve as a useful metric for foreign policy makers. By centering the desires of the people most affected by U.S. policy decisions, the United States can move to align its interests with the popular will of other societies. In policy development, upholding self-determination will require U.S. policymakers to engage with broad cross-sections of local populations and analyze whether partner governments' actions uphold the desires of their people. It also will force an assessment as to whether a proposed U.S. policy will uphold or undermine people's right to determine their future. Policymakers also will need to determine how to uphold self-determination when issues arise outside of people's relationship with their national government, at the local, interstate, or multinational level. Doing so will prevent the United States from doing harm while also uplifting the fresh policy solutions developed by the people of other nations.

Equality

Ending economic, racial, and gender inequality is a security and moral imperative for the United States and the world. While the spread of international trade and market-based economies has contributed to technological innovation²² and the alleviation²³ of extreme poverty,²⁴ it also has helped to concentrate wealth in the hands of a global elite who have used tax havens, corporate loopholes, and corruption to hoard the world's financial resources, fueling further inequality and competition over limited resources. Mass inequality has helped exacerbate divisions between identity groups rooted in economic, gender, and racial inequality, creating competition rather than a united movement for change.

Authoritarian movements take advantage of these divisions to facilitate economic exploitation and kleptocratic corruption. Authoritarian systems of government profit off state industries at the expense of their own people, while imposing austerity policies (whether at their own behest or as a result of neoliberal economic policies

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required by the Bretton Woods institutions) that harm the most vulnerable and increase the divide between rich and poor – all in the name of economic development. To increase their own economic and political power, authoritarian leaders, multinational corporations, and other corrupt actors from Saudi Arabia to Russia to the United States have used shell corporations, tax havens, money laundering schemes, and corrupt dealings to secure their interests, hoard financial wealth, and exploit workers. In the United States and around the world, this often has resulted in the loss of middle class jobs that once provided social mobility, and undermined investment in sustainable industries that could increase local communities' economic security. Meanwhile, the top 1 percent of the population controls half the world's wealth.²⁵

WORKING TOWARD EQUALITY

BY REDUCING ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

There must be a bold reformation of the international economic system to ensure the needs of all peoples – not just oligarchs and corporations – are met. While previous U.S. anti-corruption regulations have had global impact, more must be done to dismantle global oligarchy and close loopholes that protect the power of multinational corporations. The United States should require beneficial ownership reporting from American businesses and entities to help end the power of secret money in the U.S. financial system.²⁶ Passing beneficial ownership legislation, for example, would help ensure that the U.S. financial system is not used for illicit financial flows, and limit the use of shell companies to hide wealth or anonymously give endless amounts of money to undermine the influence of people in elections.

To help build economic equality, the United States should prioritize international economic policies that empower people, not corporations, by giving workers a fair playing field and enshrining the right to collective action. It also must end the undue power given to corporate interests to exploit other countries economically through investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), which allows corporations to sue countries for profits in a corporate-run tribunal. Instead, the United States should give workers a seat at the table in trade negotiations, abolish the ISDS system, raise and protect safety and labor standards, and provide workers the right to organize collectively to ensure equal protection under the law.

PURSUING EQUALITY THROUGH DEVELOPMENT FINANCE

Working toward equality is also essential to addressing great-power competition. Pursuing equality through investments in sustainable development can counter exploitative strategies like China's Belt and Road initiative²⁷ that has facilitated Chinese influence around the world, and, in some instances, given China increased control over debtor nations.²⁸ This initiative is a debt trap in another form that prevents these countries from reinvesting in their own people, undermining the economic development of these nations in the long term. Despite this reality, such loans are attractive in the face of options on offer, such as International Monetary Fund loans that often come with their own debt trap by imposing austerity spending on recipient nations to repay the loans.

Reinvigorating U.S. development finance through, for example, the newly established U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (USIDFC) is essential to offering developing countries a viable, non-exploitative alternative.²⁹ With a \$60 billion budget, USIDFC holds much promise to offer transparent, U.S. financing for economic opportunity and growth in the private sector. It is imperative that USIDFC be implemented in such a way that balances its tripartite priorities of development, national security, and commercial viability. It can do so by prioritizing local impact and establishing fair and nondiscriminatory labor practices for local workers involved in USIDFC-financed projects. It also should coordinate heavily with USAID to ensure the projects it prioritizes are actual game changers for the local economy and working people, rather than just a boon to American commercial interests.

EQUALITY AS A POLICY METRIC

Equality is an essential metric for U.S. foreign policy. U.S. policymakers must assess whether a proposed policy will help lift up the most marginalized in society. Policymakers should emphasize policies grounded in fairness, nondiscrimination, and equal opportunity. Prioritizing diversity in U.S. national security staffing also can help uphold this principle by ensuring a variety of perspectives and experiences in the policymaking process. Ensuring social and economic inclusion in U.S. international development, trade, and financial policy will be essential to undermining mass inequality.

Justice

Instilling justice as a principle of U.S. foreign policy will mean elevating the protection of human rights as a core priority of U.S engagement in the world. U.S. government institutions, the Pentagon in particular, have resisted accountability for their actions abroad, and the lack of congressional oversight since 9/11 has only furthered this trend. This must change if the United States is to be a credible actor for justice in the world. The United States must prioritize policies that prevent human suffering, hold perpetrators – including parts of the United States government and private military contractors – accountable for abuses, and ensure U.S. actions uphold international law and norms in order to help create a more inclusive and accountable world system. Accountability for abuses affiliated with U.S. actions during the post-9/11 wars primarily has meant obfuscation. The Pentagon has claimed³⁰ far fewer civilian casualties³¹ in its air campaign in Iraq and Syria, parts of which have been called a "war of annihilation,"³² than that documented by nongovernmental organizations.³³ This is not a rare occurrence: The United States has vastly undercounted civilian casualties in the targeted killing program,³⁴ and deliberately ignored well-documented gross violations of human rights by U.S. partner forces in Yemen.³⁵ These failures of justice are an attempt by the U.S. military to shield itself and its partners from accountability. It also avoids a serious public discussion as to whether killing thousands of civilians forwards the security of Americans or other people.

HOLDING THE UNITED STATES AND ITS PARTNERS ACCOUNTABLE

Silence in the face of abuses – whether those of the United States or of others – in the name of national security only fuels insecurity and does nothing to keep Americans or other people around the world safe. The United States must change its relationship with accountability and instead seek to hold itself accountable to the very norms and laws it has sought to uphold. The first step is to end the Forever War that has produced widespread civilian harm, and to engage in truth commissions to publicly reconcile with the conduct of U.S. military activities, its abetting of partner abuses, and violations of American civil liberties since 9/11.

The United States also should start by adhering to international law in any military engagement or security cooperation, rather than making legal interpretations that undermine compliance to the Law of Armed

The United States must prioritize policies that prevent human suffering, hold perpetrators – including parts of the United States government and private military contractors – accountable for abuses, and ensure U.S. actions uphold international law and norms in order to help create a more inclusive and accountable world system. Conflict.³⁶ It also can help further the cause of justice by issuing transparent rules of engagement that expand on the civilian harm protections in the Obama-era presidential policy guidance.³⁷ It should enforce the human rights provisions of the Foreign Assistance Act and Arms Export Control Act and cut off security assistance to countries that engage in gross violations of human rights.³⁸ Vetting foreign military partners for abuses also must occur before extending security cooperation agreements or the transfer of military equipment, weapons, and other services.

While the conduct of foreign policy ultimately will require U.S. engagement with governments that do harm to their own and other people, that engagement must not create a blank check for impunity. The United States should never deny its own purported values and always make clear in words and in action that it supports human rights, accountable governance, and justice for all. In practice, this should not prevent diplomatic engagement with governments that repress their own people or commit human rights abuses. Instead, as was the case with Iran, the starting point may be first resolving a collective security concern, which can build a foundation for deeper engagement on human rights and governance reform in the future.

ESTABLISHING MULTILATERAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

In its most common parlance, accountability in U.S. foreign policy often equates to punitive airstrikes against non-allied perpetrators of human rights violations. Such actions – often taken by the President in circumvention of Congress' Article I authority – are applauded by both sides of the aisle because the United States *did something* in the face of atrocities. Yet in reality, such airstrikes do little to create real accountability, and more often than not fuel more violence.³⁹ Punitive military action cannot take the place of diplomacy and actual accountability.

Rather than further militarizing human rights, the United States must shift its approach to help establish international accountability mechanisms to deter future human rights atrocities. The United States should ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as its previous failure to do so undermined the power of the institution to bring justice. While international tribunals and universal jurisdiction remain viable tools, the United States should seek instead to instill accountability within the United Nations as part of the institution's current reform effort. To prevent the U.N. Security Council from impeding collective action for justice, for example, the United States should support expanding the Council's non- and permanent membership to include more members from the Global South,⁴⁰ and support adopting a code of conduct that ends the use of the Security Council veto for Council actions that would create accountability for acts of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.⁴¹

JUSTICE AS A POLICY METRIC

Justice is a critical metric for reforming U.S. engagement abroad. In policy development, it will require U.S. policymakers to critically assess past U.S. actions that have undermined accountability for human rights abuses. It will require the United States to hold itself accountable under international law if it seeks to hold others to the same standard. It will require for the United States to instill accountability into its bilateral military relationships and hold partners accountable for human rights abuses in every instance, not only when convenient. It will require the United States to speak out in the face of abuses even if it is the U.S. military or allied nations that commit them. Only by doing so can the United States help lead the reform of the international governance system to create true accountability mechanisms that deter future atrocities.

Conclusion

While this may appear to be a radical project requiring immutable resources, it is important to remember that the United States rose to the task following World War II and sought to make the world a better, safer place. This approach will require the U.S. government to hold itself to a higher standard than the pursuit of power. It also requires a whole-of-society approach to changing the United States' role in the world to ensure political momentum behind this reformation. The good news is that polling of the U.S. public supports this more restrained, constructive approach to world affairs⁴² and suggests support for policymakers who take bold action to re-center U.S. engagement on the well-being and security of all. If Washington seeks to reestablish the United States as a true force for good in the world, it would do well to heed the desires of the American people and people around the world for a more values-driven approach to U.S. foreign policy.

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