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U.S.-UN Re-Engagement Roundtable: Multilateral Leadership for Today's Global Challenges

December 2, 2021 | United States Institute of Peace

December 14, 2021 | Stimson Center

Overview

Reinvigorating U.S. leadership in the United Nations and other multilateral institutions is essential to addressing the most pressing challenges facing the United States, and the world. Under the previous administration, the U.S. withdrew or initiated withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and multiple UN organizations, in addition to renouncing several other international treaty obligations and reducing financial support for multilateral bodies. Given the high stakes for the return of effective U.S. leadership at the United Nations, leading American think tanks, non-governmental organizations, and universities, alongside U.S. government policy practitioners, came together, on December 2 and 14, 2021, to assess initial progress of the Biden-Harris administration. They also considered near and medium-term recommended actions for the new administration, as well as steps to rebuild U.S.-UN relations and to renew U.S. leadership at the UN in key priority areas for U.S. foreign policy.

This Chatham House Rule two-day roundtable was hosted in a hybrid-format at the United States Institute of Peace (December 2) and the Stimson Center (December 14). Selected thought leaders, practitioners, and policymakers engaged in an informed discussion and shared their experiences, scholarly insights, and ideas on reinvigorating America leadership and influence across the UN system's three main pillars: peace and security, sustainable development (including climate action), and human rights (including the rule of law, humanitarian action, and democracy promotion).

Abridged Keynote Remarks

By Amb. Jeffrey Prescott, Deputy to the U.S. Ambassador to the UN

Since taking office, the Biden administration has recommitted the United States to multilateralism. The President ran a campaign which promised a return to America's system of alliances and a multilateral approach to foreign policy. Starting from Day 1 of the administration, he has done just that: the U.S. has now rejoined the Paris Climate Accords and rescinded the previous administration's decision to withdraw from the WHO. We've restored American

leadership on human rights within the multilateral system and were elected in October to a seat on the UN Human Rights Council. The administration has worked to advance racial equity (even as we humbly recognize our country's own struggles to achieve human rights for all) and restore American leadership on LGBTQ+ rights and sexual and reproductive health. We also spent months working to secure a Security Council resolution to reauthorize the delivery of aid to Syrians across the Syrian border. The State Department has made institutional changes as well, including establishing a Multilateral Personnel Strategy unit to assist with the campaigns of Americans running for mid- and high-level UN agency positions. We are working to strengthen UN peacekeeping and bring fresh attention to proliferation threats, including North Korea.

I'd like to preview three of the priorities the Biden Administration sees for America's long-term multilateral strategy. First, we must work to ensure the multilateral system safeguards a rules-based order and hold accountable countries that would invade their neighbors, commit genocide, or proliferate dangerous weapons. Second, we must ensure human rights remain at the core of the UN system, standing up for the rights of vulnerable communities, improve the ability of the UN Human Rights Council to conduct meaningful inquiries, ensure that our digital future is free and open, and strengthen democracy at home and abroad. Third, we should make sure the UN and other international organizations are capable of responding to the challenges of today and tomorrow, including on climate, cyber, migration, AI, and global public health and pandemics.

The work to re-engage the United States within our multilateral system will be a years-long project. We will need money from Congress. We will need to modernize our multilateral workforce. We will need ideas from the think tank community. And will need to partner in creative ways – working with the private sector, civil society, and state and local governments to see these goals through. We will need to ask tough questions, such as how do we ensure the Security Council and General Assembly don't break down into Cold War-style stasis? How can the UN exercise principled leadership amongst the divergent values systems of its funders?

For all the challenges which face our world, President Biden has made one thing very clear: America is not the kind of country that walks away from the very system of multilateralism and alliances it helped create. Ultimately, the United States will have to offer the world an affirmative, prescriptive agenda for the future of multilateralism – one grounded in our values and national interests that also appeals to the broadest possible coalition of countries willing to help us implement it.

Welcome Remarks: *Lise Grande*, President & CEO, United States Institute of Peace

Moderator: *Richard Ponzio*, Director, Global Governance, Justice & Security Program, and Senior Fellow, Stimson Center

Roundtable #1: U.S. Re-Engagement on UN Peace and Security

Co-Moderators: *Liz Hume*, Acting President and CEO at Alliance for Peacebuilding; and *Tyler Beckelman*, Director of International Partnerships, United States Institute of Peace.

Lead-Off Speakers: *Hardin Lang*, Vice President for Programs and Policy, Refugees International; *Lise Howard*, Professor of Government and Foreign Service, Georgetown University and President, Academic Council on the UN System; *Frances Brown*, Senior Fellow and Co-Director, Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; *Robert Jenkins*, Assistant to the Administrator, Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization, USAID; and *Richard Gowan*, UN Director, International Crisis Group.

Overview: This session considered practical suggestions and concrete steps that the Biden administration could take to strengthen the multilateral peace and security architecture, including: elevating multilateral conflict prevention efforts, consistent with the U.S. Global Fragility Act; supporting more effective and inclusive conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts; and augmenting U.S. support for multilateral peace operations.

Framing Questions

1. The UN has recognized the need to elevate investments in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. How can the U.S. best support the UN Peacebuilding Commission, Support Office, and Fund, including through the implementation of the Sustaining Peace Agenda (which is similar to the Global Fragility Act)?
2. In addition to clearing U.S. arrears, what are the practical steps that the Biden administration could take to strengthen multilateral peace operations?

Peace and Security

- We are at a thirty year high in global violent conflict – further compounded by the pandemic, climate change, and worsening social cohesion around the world.
- The fastest growing type of conflict is internationalized civil war; we are now witnessing less respect for sovereignty across the world.
- China and Russia are hedging against the U.S. in the Security Council – avoiding fights sometimes, but also pushing back when they want to (for instance, on Burma and Bosnia). The Chinese do not want to offend the US too much, while the Russians are less scrupulous. The UN Security Council (UNSC) remains largely divided.
- Reforming the UNSC is challenging, because it is a political issue, and China will never accept Japan or India into the P5. However, these challenges give political incentives for the U.S. to talk more about UNSC reform because by putting China on the spot and potentially placing the U.S. in a better light internationally.
- Any solution to the conflicts and the dire humanitarian crises in Afghanistan and Ethiopia has to involve the multilateral system and integration of assistance. As countries withdraw from Afghanistan, the UN shoulders most of the humanitarian work, and the world body is likely to play an even more significant political role with the Taliban, as the chance for renewed conflicts remains high. In Ethiopia, the multilateral system will

have to step-up on providing famine relief (WFP), investigating human rights abuses (OHCHR), diplomacy (AU-UN), and post-conflict reconstruction (WB-UNDP).

- Russia will veto the U.S. resolution calling for the UNSC to do more on climate security. But there are many creative ways for America and its allies to support the UN climate-security nexus through the Security Council.
- Rising forced migration has stretched thin limited domestic resources globally. Tackling this challenge requires giving refugees greater participation in local economies.

Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping

- The Secretary-General himself reported last year that there has been little progress on increasing, restructuring, and better prioritizing funding for peacebuilding.
- The U.S. funded a mere \$300,000 of the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) between 2016 to 2020, compared to \$17 million from Germany; in short, if we do not fund UN peacebuilding, it will not work – and the U.S. can play a helpful role in ensuring that this fund delivers on the ground. Some in the Biden administration have already identified this shortcoming, and discussion is now underway to step up U.S. contributions to the PBF.
- Outside of its assessed contributions, the U.S. also does not contribute any voluntary resources to the UN’s Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), which manages Special Political Missions, oversees Resident Coordinators in fragile states, and houses critical mediation and electoral support units, despite the fact that it is headed by the most senior U.S. official in the UN system. The U.S. should explore opportunities to strengthen its support for DPPA’s important mission.
- Engaging and strengthening the Peacebuilding Architecture – including the Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Support Office, and the Peacebuilding Fund – is more important than ever since the P5 cannot issue vetoes through these mechanisms. The Peacebuilding Commission worked well in Burundi, where it offered a unique political channel. It provides many useful small-scale types of support, so the challenge then is how to scale-up these efforts.
- Much qualitative and quantitative evidence from academia shows that peacekeeping is working, even though it is not perceived as successful. There are clear correlations between peacekeeping and less civilian death, less violence, less spread of conflict, less gender-based violence, and more robust post-conflict institutions. A civil war is more likely to end in a negotiated settlement with the involvement of an impartial third party, such as a UN peacekeeping force with political officers.
- Unfortunately, the international community is no longer initiating new peacekeeping missions; the bigger political picture does not allow it. Last time there was such a hiatus in new missions was during the Cold War. Even then, the Security Council was more prone to approve new missions (mostly in the area of interstate conflicts, rather than civil wars). Without the inception of new UN or even regional peace operations, the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) is likely to play a bigger role in conflict resolutions (which is the case currently in Ethiopia and why it is essential to ensure integration of peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance).

- It is critical to understand that peacekeeping is not warfighting, nor is it counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism. Peacekeeping does not rely on force; rather, it is more political and technical.
- Many peacebuilding and conflict resolution programs center around teaching local communities how to better communicate with different actors, how to conduct consultations, and how to deliver services, etc. But local politics and broader governance structures often do not incentivize these programs. For example, Afghan officials did not bother holding local-level consultations, not because the international community hasn't taught them to do so. Rather, these officials concluded that their governing institutions did not wield real authority at the local level.
- [Locally-Led Peacebuilding](#) (LLPB) is critical to understanding the needs and values of communities impacted by conflict, violence, and fragility, and recognizes that local solutions are fundamental to preventing and reducing violent conflict and building peace. LLPB is distinct from locally implemented programming, wherein outside donors and international implementers design and fund the programs, but local actors and organizations manage and facilitate activities or pass-through funding to local organizations.
- There is an allure of focusing on local level programs especially in the peacebuilding sector, as we often observe gratifying and measurable progress from local-level interventions. But these community level programs are only sustainable if the broader political and security contexts are favorable; in short, we need to connect local-level programming to national and regional politics.
- One critical gray zone in peacebuilding and conflict resolution is illicit financial networks that are often used to fund conflicts and rebel networks. Multilateral institutions tend to focus on the military or political incentives behind conflicts, but they sometimes miss the economic causes. We used to do a better job combating illicit markets in conflict zones (for instance, in Liberia).

US Foreign Policy

- The U.S. loves talking about multilateralism, but not when it involves funding multilateral solutions. It likes to lead and coordinate, but not when it has to cede control. This holds America back from having the extra edge in global leadership. Supporting multilateralism requires us not just to talk about it, but also to put our money where our mouth is.
- There has been a real change in the way the U.S. engages with the UN – diplomacy is back. America's strong push to keep alive the UN cross border assistance program in Syria, for example, showcases what it can do through the multilateral system. However, allies still think that U.S. engagement in the UN is inconsistent. The same level of energy and leadership cannot be found across all issues in the Security Council, such as the Gaza conflict last May.
- Allies want to know where U.S. strategic priorities are. The U.S. is doing the right thing in terms of engagement and messaging. But allies want to know what is this administration's big strategic position on peace and security that would define its engagement with the UN? It has a clear strategy on pandemic and climate, but less so on

peace and security, especially how peace and security are integrated into covid and climate programming.

- America is still looking at the Horn of Africa and the Sahel through the prism of counterterrorism. Fighting insurgents is completely different from conflict resolution. We should reset how we see these conflicts – as civil wars rather than campaigns against terrorists. Instead of focusing on killing terrorists, we should focus on why there is a conflict in the first place because conflict drives violent extremism.

Global Fragility Act (GFA)

- The GFA provides the tools and architecture for multilateral peacebuilding. It mandates the State Department and USAID to work together and prioritize better with international partners worldwide.
- In many ways, the GFA closely mirrors the UN's Sustaining Peace Agenda. The GFA can help the U.S. engage and coordinate with like-minded allies and multilateral partners (such as the UN and AU). Otherwise, the U.S. risks working in parallel to its allies and multilateral partners without real alignment or the ability to leverage resources.
- The GFA also has a staffing problem. Without adequate staffing, the investments the GFA makes will just create more tasks for agencies to process and make them less effective. We also need more flexible programming on the ground. Labor intensive as it might be, USAID's [Office of Transition Initiatives](#) (OTI) provides a good model to follow.

Recommendations

- With a divided UN Security Council, the U.S. should engage carefully through the Council when it can. But it also needs to look more into supporting multilateral peacebuilding efforts outside the Security Council, such as the UN Peacebuilding Commission and Fund, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (now headed by the senior-most American official in the UN system), and relevant World Bank conflict resolution programs – each where adversarial powers do not have a veto.
- To circumvent the gridlock in the Security Council, one solution might be to upgrade the Peacebuilding Commission, which is currently an advisory body to the UNSC and General Assembly, into a more authoritative council (similar to what happened, in 2005-6, when the Human Rights Commission was upgraded into an empowered council). This will allow it to better address second and third-order conflicts (not on the agenda of the UNSC), by giving it more authority, tools, and the ability to mobilize resources for effective conflict management and resolution.
- The U.S. should learn to utilize peacekeeping as an extension of its foreign policy; we have much to learn from the French in this regard.
- We need to connect the peacebuilding agenda to the democracy agenda (i.e., “democratic peacebuilding”). Too often the two communities work in parallel, including within the U.S. government. Conflict is inherently political, and expressing conflicting views peacefully is integral to effective democratic governance.
- We need to avoid hyper-focusing on local-level programs in the peacebuilding sector. Community-level programs – while often they can achieve gratifying and measurable progress – are only sustainable if the broader political and security contexts are favorable. We need to connect local-level programming to national and regional politics.

- We must have a serious political discussion on the future of international peacekeeping among UN member states to i. step up investments in peacekeeping, ii. retool the UN’s peacekeeping presence across the world (particularly in the Sahel), and iii. make peacekeeping more flexible so that the international community can work with different actors (such as the Taliban in Afghanistan).
- Conflict resolution and peacekeeping are inherently different from counter-insurgency. The U.S. must reset how it view conflicts in regions such as the Sahel and get out of the counter-terrorism mindset.
- Humanitarian aid is inherently political. Historically, it was often used behind the scenes to influence politics within a conflict. The U.S. needs to be flexible and creative on how to use large-scale humanitarian aid to better manage and bring about the resolution of a conflict. The U.S. also needs to reform its own humanitarian operations and link these up better with the UN’s humanitarian work.
- The 2023 Summit for the Future, proposed by the Secretary General in his recent *Our Common Agenda* report, offers a rare opportunity for the U.S. to contribute to meaningful reforms in the UN’s peace and security architecture.

Roundtable #2: U.S. Re-Engagement on UN Climate Action and Sustainable Development

Co-Moderators: *Kristen Cordell*, Senior Policy Advisor on Security and Development Policy, USAID; and *Richard Ponzio*, Director, Global Governance, Justice & Security Program and Senior Fellow, Stimson Center.

Lead-Off Speakers: *Hilary French*, Program Management Officer, United Nations Environment Program Regional Office for North America; *Sarah Mendelson*, Distinguished Service Professor of Public Policy, Carnegie Mellon University and Former U.S. Representative to the UN Economic and Social Council; *Kaysie Brown*, Vice-President for Policy and Strategy Initiatives, UN Foundation; and *Hugh Dugan*, Former Special Assistant for International Organization, National Security Council.

Overview: This session considered practical suggestions and urgently needed reforms related to United States policy priorities in the UN development system and climate governance architecture, informed, in part, by the recent U.S. Multilateral Aid Review Task Force and Peer Review Group.

Framing Questions

1. To deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’s “Decade of Action” (2021-2030) and Paris Climate Agreement goals, what are the most pressing institutional, legal, normative, or operational reform priorities to better equip UN development agencies, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and related bodies?
2. How do we build out these frameworks through shared implementation objectives and analysis of environment and development challenges? What are the quick wins for shared operational action over the next year? What about shared financing opportunities?

The United Nations and the Sustainable Development Goals

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present an opportunity to instill democratic ideals into countries served by the United Nations, while combating authoritarianism.
- For effective climate action, targeted sustainable development investments are needed in both urban centers and agricultural communities alike.
- The tendency amongst nation-states is to implement “quick wins” that affirm and support specific SDGs. However, to realize the full potential of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within a country, more robust and medium-to-long-term efforts are needed that adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Elements of sustainable development are siloed into categories, when many issues pertaining to climate action are closely interlinked. This pattern is seen on the local, state, transregional and global levels.
- Failing to tackle sustainable development stems, in part, from the United Nations’ fragmented and sometimes outdated institutional framework. The UN was built for the 20th century, including immediate post-Cold War, threats and challenges. Today’s 21st century problems, beginning first and foremost with the climate crisis, require an upgraded United Nations that both understands the need for and can skillfully forge integrated solutions.
- The United Nations is only as effective insofar as its members maintain shared goals and uphold their individual and collective commitments.
- The Secretary-general is promoting the right ideas, but further action is needed, including through the increased participation of marginalized and voiceless groups worldwide.
- Chinese influence over the UN represents a growing concern for many Western countries. While the UN is an inherently liberal institution, China’s efforts to alter it by increasing the influence of authoritarian states threatens both the UN’s general stability and effectiveness in advancing the SDGs.
- Though China may put forth a narrative of itself as a concerned state, it has come up short in providing international leadership toward addressing the triple planetary crisis, in particular in failing to tackle pollution and waste management both within its borders and abroad.

United States Foreign and Domestic Policy

- The United States has placed an emphasis on implementing the needed measures to secure the SDGs, because of their inherent value to democratic systems. This is an area the Biden administration can help to further capitalize upon (especially since the principles espoused by the Biden administration align with the SDGs’ objectives).
- The UN Environment Program (UNEP) is focused on tackling the triple planetary crises of: 1) biodiversity and nature loss, 2) pollution and waste, and 3) climate change. In the realm of plastics, U.S. Secretary of State Blinken recently visited UNEP’s headquarters in Nairobi, where he announced U.S. support for the launch of multilateral negotiations on a global agreement to combat ocean plastic pollution.
- U.S. foreign policy should work to ensure that the needs of the middle class are met. This involves having the U.S. government leading by the power of example in putting in the

required work to, for example, meet citizens' needs and safeguard the environment as demonstrated by America's Environmental Protection Agency.

- Domestic regulations and/or legislation for better managing methane, oil, and gas production should remain a priority in implementing the recently passed infrastructure bill. The closely related Build Back Better framework also provides an opportunity to advance SDGs implementation across America.
- The United States needs to focus on leveraging and working with an array of actors. Some of the most interesting advances were out of the investors in the private sector.
- The United States appears to be undercounting the challenge and nature of financing SDGs, and it needs to leverage the sustainable development contributions of myriad, diverse actors, including from across the private sector.
- Despite opposition from some major powers, the U.S. should place greater emphasis on the climate-security nexus and the tangible ways the UN Security Council can contribute to climate action (particularly on generating a greater sense of urgency and helping to mobilize additional resources for worldwide climate mitigation and adaptation efforts).

COP-26

- COP-26 in Glasgow was presented internationally as a “breakthrough” or “breakdown” moment for addressing the climate crisis. Though COP26 failed to meet major benchmarks, formal and parallel agreements were made. Major commitments, backed by some 141 countries, were made in support of curbing forestry resources loss.
- On international finance for climate adaptation, President Biden announced an emergency plan for adaptation and resilience for the future. Moving forward to COP-27, it will be important to see where we land on this major commitment.
- Previously, the UN was barely associated with the environment, and now its annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs) provide a forum for the climate crisis that captures front-page news worldwide.
- Young people think about the climate from a different perspective than the generation that has established the current climate action plan. By engaging youth and their unique perspectives, climate solutions can become more up-to-date (contemporary) and effective.

Recommendations

- The image of the United Nations, and how its work is communicated, need to be upgraded. In particular, introducing and promoting individual leaders within the United Nations, can help the general public more easily follow the work of the world body and the many practical and tangible ways it helps to improve the living conditions and livelihoods of millions worldwide.
- The SDGs need to be promoted as a brand in support of democratic ideals. In turn, different UN initiatives and projects in support of SDGs implementation need to become common knowledge amongst the general public.
- Some organizations and scholars promote the need for international prosecution against adverse, long-term environmental impacts (sometimes referred to as “ecocide”), without

necessarily accounting for the immediate human impact of the action deemed reprehensible for the environment.

- A multi-stakeholder-government alliance is needed to ensure that SDGs are upheld in all areas of the global supply chain and within private and public multinational enterprises. This would require the help of global investors to address prominent financial and other accountability challenges that arise when striving to balance environmental protection and economic development goals.
- One important area that requires further attention within the work of the United Nations is demand-driven data. More specifically, greater UN investments could help to analyze the needs of local communities and then inform UN operational adjustments accordingly to better prepare communities for success in a climate-stressed world. By targeting the needs of local communities, the broader global SDGs agenda can be met more effectively – in short, by introducing a “local to global mentality.” In part, this is because the struggles at the local level provide indicators of where the “choke points” are occurring that can impede and even halt sustainable development.

Roundtable #3: U.S. Re-Engagement on UN Human Rights and the Rule of Law, Humanitarian Action, and Democracy Promotion

Co-Moderators: *Paula Boland*, President, United Nations Association of the National Capital Area; and *Hardin Lang*, Vice President for Programs and Policy, Refugees International.

Lead-Off Speakers: *Keith Harper*, Former U.S. Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Human Rights Council; *Mark P. Lagon*, Chief Policy Officer, Friend of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and Former President, Freedom House; *Alex Thier*, Chief Executive Office, Global Fund to End Modern Slavery and Co-Director, Task Force on US Strategy to Support Democracy and Counter Authoritarianism, Freedom House; *Jenny Marron*, Senior Director, Public Policy and Government Affairs, InterAction; and *Peter Hoffman*, Associate Professor of International Affairs and Director of Graduate Programs in International Affairs, The New School.

Overview: This session explored America’s commitment to the UN’s agenda on humanitarian action, human rights, the rule of law, and democracy promotion, in light of the Biden administration’s re-engagement with the UN Human Rights Council and its recent Leaders’ Summit for Democracy.

Framing Questions

1. How can the U.S. help the UN preserve and build upon the gains made in strengthening the UN’s Humanitarian Architecture since the World Humanitarian Summit (2016)?
2. In connection with the December 9-10, 2021 Leaders’ Summit for Democracy, what priorities should the Biden administration push through the Human Rights Council and other UN bodies on issues pertaining to human rights, the rule of law, and democracy promotion worldwide?

Human Rights and the Rule of Law

- The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) plays a meaningful role in protecting human rights, but it also has serious flaws – as evident in some of the Member States that serve on it. As the U.S. regains its seat at the table in 2022, it needs to work on upholding human rights and the high ideals of the HRC.
- A fundamental set of questions are: what is the distance between the U.S. as a global force standing alone and a UN that is “agnostic” about the fundamental issues of democracy and human rights? What is the role of the UN in an era where democracy and human rights promotion will be difficult? Does the UN have the tools for effective action, or will it become a vehicle for deeper division given its known limitations?
- A way to invest in the UN’s human rights system should be established. If human rights promotion is not led by the HRC, then where? Former U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley said she would work to promote human rights in the UN Security Council, which is not a better situated institution for addressing human rights than the UN Human Rights Council.
- Greater focus should be put on dealing with general criticisms about the HRC: poor membership, its continued hyper-focus on Israel, and the council’s inability to resolve many human rights problems.
- General silence over human rights abuses in Xinjiang in connection with Beijing hosting the Winter Olympics is credibility-sapping, while China will intimidate members of the Human Rights Council who seek to raise the matter in this UN body.
- There are two major diplomatic challenges we are facing as it pertains to human rights promotion: How do we overcome China’s coercive diplomacy on a broader strategic level? And in terms of advancing economic, social and cultural rights, how do we connect human rights to the younger generation’s deep concern for climate action and greater inclusion in global governance?
- The Obama administration, through its White House CVE Summit, incentivized then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to develop a UN plan of action of preventing violent extremism, which would serve to globalize the administration CVE Summit agenda. However, not all member states were sympathetic to the Obama administration’s late-in-the-day elevation of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) as a priority, given its focus on civil society and other locally-led interventions and emphasis on addressing human rights-related and political, economic, and social drivers of violent extremism. As a result, although the plan of action has influenced the direction of UN programming and the work of the UN Secretariat more broadly, the UNGA has never endorsed the plan.
- The UN system, reflecting how its member states tend to address issues, is full of institutional and other bureaucratic siloes, which make it difficult to effectively address issues which require an integrated, multi-disciplinary response such as terrorism. These silos need to be broken down if we hope to see the UN’s response become more effective and sustainable.
- Although a consensus UN counter-terrorism framework exists on paper, as evidenced by the 2006 UN Global CT Strategy, which has been renewed seven times since then, significant differences among the members exist in so far as how it should be

implemented. These differences are exacerbated by the lack of a universal definition of terrorism, which creates space for authoritarian regimes to misuse the UN counter-terrorism framework against its political opponents, civil society, journalists, and human rights defenders. With waning US engagement on CT issues at the UN over the past five years, authoritarian regimes have increased their counter-terrorism influence at the UN. These countries are more than happy to see the post-9/11, highly securitized, counter-terrorism paradigm continue. However, these risks undermining the Biden administration's effort to right-size counter-terrorism (not to mention to elevate democracy and human rights as priorities) and move beyond the 9/11 era where CT was the tail that wagged the dog on other foreign and security policy issues.

UN Humanitarian Action

- The Biden administration is putting other UN issues before humanitarian ones, resulting in an even larger humanitarian funding gap and less support for expanding humanitarian access. Meanwhile, global humanitarian needs are skyrocketing. The requirements needed worldwide over the past two years have doubled.
- The amount of forcibly displaced people is at an all-time high, and countries are closing borders instead of reinforcing norms. Furthermore, COVID-19 shows no signs of abating in countries facing humanitarian challenges. Only 4% of vaccines worldwide are reaching countries facing humanitarian emergencies.
- Hunger and food insecurity are rising, and violent conflict is hitting civilians particularly hard. Meanwhile, humanitarian aid currently focuses on what we think people need, when it should really listen to what people say they need and fulfill their needs.
- At the same time, since 2016, money through the UN has gone far more into humanitarian programming than development.
- The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit's outcome document remains the touchstone for the humanitarian community. Its language is somewhat useful but vague, and there is a lot of frustration on how to operationalize the document.
- In terms of the localization agenda, it is not clear how the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) sees the connection to humanitarian issues. There should be a broad push in the agency to put local partners first.
- UN Peacekeeping has been tremendously successful, including in improving the conditions for humanitarian action. However, there has only been one prevention peacekeeping mission in history. We are now in the eighth year of UN Member States not establishing a new peacekeeping mission. We are underusing this tool that has repeatedly worked well, which is a reflection of the political stalemate in the world at present, somewhat reminiscent of the cold war era.

Democracy Promotion

- The trust in the integrity of American values has been eroded. Too often, America first means America alone. Recommitting to multilateralism is, therefore, essential. There is an urgency to understand the needs (and interests) of other actors in the multilateral system.

- Supporting democracy supports American values and helps create a more secure, stable and prosperous international environment, where the U.S. can better advance its interests and policy goals too. The world needs a champion for democracy now more than ever.
- International credibility is essential. The U.S. has to address its problems at home: race, guns, capital punishment, etc. The U.S. needs to walk the walk on democracy promotion vis-a-vis Middle East allies, and it needs to stand-up to stop their self-serving arguments that nothing can be done. Some things can be done, especially through creativity, which can affect norms.
- There is a deep and broad bipartisan consensus concerned with the danger of backsliding on human rights worldwide. The challenges to democracy are accelerating, both domestically and abroad. What initiatives are most urgently needed, including in countering the rise of authoritarianism?
- Greater attention should be placed on China's crucial role on climate action and how to weigh the Biden administration's climate priority with other issues, such as democracy and human rights promotion.
- We should look at how humanitarian issues are treated with regard to democracy promotion and build upon momentum generated through the Summit of Democracies series. U.S. is most effective internationally when it commands respect and builds multilateral coalitions.

Recommendations

- We need to change how we view people who receive humanitarian aid; they should not continue to be seen as the problem.
- There should also be a refocus on prevention efforts when speaking about humanitarian crises.
- Around 20-50% of all humanitarian emergencies are predictable. Anticipatory Action (AA) should be implemented to pre-emptively stop humanitarian emergencies from occurring or escalating. Although there is a financial risk in putting money in societies facing potential humanitarian risks, this will yield more benefits rather than cleaning up after the mess. However, AA is a nut that has yet to be cracked. Achieving this kind of goal requires a new type of information and data gathering that offices, such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, simply do not possess.
- Greater humanitarian attention should be placed on people who are at risk and vulnerable, alongside those people facing actual identified urgent needs.
- We should develop a “localization agenda” with the aim of decolonizing humanitarian aid (even though this is more provocative than what mainstream diplomats wish to hear, reflecting an inherent problem in international decision-making).
- Policy language itself should be as local as possible and international as necessary. This suggests that international partners should follow local leads, as an important step toward localizing humanitarian aid.
- More decision-making authority should go to those who have actually experienced humanitarian disasters – local actors such as local officials and aid workers.
- Applying new tools from the digital revolution (e.g., biometric data protection) can help to better address the needs of displaced populations.

- When the Bush administration did not participate in the HRC, there were six sessions on Israel. U.S. engagement can address this bias against Israel. When the U.S. engaged with the HRC under President Obama, the Council reduced its hyper-focus on Israel and addressed North Korea (with a Commission of Inquiry affecting the Security Council's agenda) and Syria in terms of atrocities.
- The U.S. should view its own internal challenges as an opportunity for when approaching much-needed HRC reforms; a guiding principle for U.S. engagement should be one of humility and speaking honestly about its own struggle domestically with safeguarding democracy and human rights.
- The U.S. must work towards finding opportunities for the UN to hold powerful actors accountable. Many UN outcomes in the democracy, rule of law, and human rights space have been very weak, making it easy for opponents to criticize the world body.
- The U.S. should redouble efforts at the UN to safeguard the rights of those most vulnerable. An example at the junction of migration, vulnerable populations and extreme exploitation is continued human trafficking and modern slavery – still major human rights calamities in some countries. This is one issue where multilateral assessment and policy instruments need to be as efficacious and coordinated as the U.S. bilateral posture.
- The U.S., its allies, and the wider international community are not going to make progress by whittling down to the least common denominator, in working to advance fundamental human rights worldwide.

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