



The United States in an Interconnected World: An Agenda for 2021

Academy Election 2020 Project
Working Group:
**Advance National Interests in a Changing Global
Context**





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ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address [Grand Challenges in Public Administration](#). These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Individuals of the [Advance National Interests in a Changing Global Context](#) Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for new opportunities for the U.S. in a diffuse and complex international system.

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THE UNITED STATES IN AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD: AN AGENDA FOR 2021

A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
ADVANCE NATIONAL INTERESTS IN A CHANGING GLOBAL CONTEXT**

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INTRODUCTION

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) recently identified [“Advance National Interests in a Changing Global Context”](#) (*Grand Challenges*) as one of its 12 [Grand Challenges in Public Administration](#). (*Grand Challenges*)

Although the United States remains the world’s most powerful nation, the unipolar moment of the early post-Cold War years has been replaced with a much more diffuse international system and a wider array of complex issues. This in turn is unsettled in unparalleled ways by the COVID-19 pandemic. Global issues requiring sustained attention are manifold, including:

- Many vulnerable nations are experiencing state breakdown, terrorism, natural disasters, and environmental degradation, accentuated and exacerbated by the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic;
- The world has the largest population flows and total number of refugees since the 1940s;
- Russia has aggressively challenged other countries’ borders and political systems;
- China’s rise has fueled tensions in East Asia and beyond; and
- Nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and Asia could destabilize the regional and global order.

Against this backdrop, there are important opportunities to reassert and advance America’s global interests, values and leadership.

- In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of effective governments and robust civil society, at all levels, to lead out of crises - whether as lenders-, givers-, or doctors-of-last-resort – becomes more clear than ever.

- The clamor for democratic and accountable governance will grow louder, reaching nations that seem cemented in autocracy today—like China or Russia.
- Globalization and supply chains will be reconfigured in a collision between the drive for cost efficiencies and a renewed impetus to protect markets.
- Technological progress will connect societies ever more tightly across geography—just think of the upcoming impact of 5G. Instant access to information, even imperfect information, will raise people’s aspirations and change social norms. Cultural convergence will accelerate.
- A growing array of mega risks will materialize. Climate-related disasters, global pandemic out-breaks, cross-border financial meltdowns, conflict-driven human migration, refugee crises, other humanitarian catastrophes, and geo-conflicts capable of mass destruction are not just possible but probable.
- A new, vivid recognition will be cemented that global crises cannot be resolved through national action alone, whether the crisis at hand is a virulent pandemic, an environmental disaster, or a cyber-attack, though new models of global collaboration will be needed.

Should the United States choose to retreat from leadership on these issues, we face the prospect of a more uncertain, less free, and less prosperous world, with the many repercussions that would have for our welfare and way of life.

INTERNATIONAL AND FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES

The United States faces a number of critical challenges in this area that must be addressed:

- Global health;
- Public diplomacy;
- Democratic institutions;
- Internal management capacity.

Global Health

It is critical that the United States is able to rapidly respond to global health, climate or migration related crises, with attention to flexibility to respond to the unexpected. While the United States has long traditions of rapid response to disaster world-wide—earthquake, hurricane, flood—the United States faces heightened danger in an increasingly interconnected world – as a recent high-level commission declares (*CSIS Commission on Strengthening America’s Health Security*). Population growth and movement puts more people in close proximity, climate change and loss of natural habitat increase potential for disease vectors to advance, and global health risks often track with political and social instability that inhibits effective responses.

The U.S. capacity for response—both domestically and globally—to such challenges is being tested today, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, on a calamitous scale. Multiple threats intersect – the loss of life and the medical challenges of treating patients and developing treatments and vaccines; the immediate economic effects, as the world confronts near unprecedented economic slowdown; the long-term destruction of opportunity, as for example the UN projection that the pandemic may push 130 million people into extreme poverty by 2030 (Igoe); and the complex fractures in international systems and cooperation for response. (“‘Sadness’ and Disbelief From a World Missing American Leadership”) And there is the recurrent prospect that it can happen again.

While the final word on the response to this pandemic has yet to be written, the interconnection of safety and security of the health of American citizens with global conditions is undeniable; and the capacity of the United States to respond, and to lead, is widely questioned. The dimensions of the crisis are yet unfolding – not only detection and treatment of victims, but the ability to mobilize technologies, the capacity of economies to adapt and rebound, the equity in which treatment and protections are afforded, and the efficacy in mobilizing and coordinating leadership at multiple levels.

One thing is clear: the U.S. capacity to respond to global health crises and related disaster conditions is an essential consideration for the safety of U.S. citizens, for U.S. defense policy, and for our commercial and economic interests. It is also a cornerstone of our leadership responsibilities in the world. Issues are complex, fast-changing, and unpredictable. We have traditionally responded with generosity, intelligence, and sacrifice to crises on a one to one basis. As the recent CSIS Commission on Strengthening America’s Health Security writes, now is the time: “to adopt ... [an] integrated package of critical actions to replace the crisis-complacency cycle with a doctrine of continuous prevention, protection, and resilience.”

In the face of the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on U.S. and global health, it is easy to lose sight of the policy initiatives that have been underway or under consideration before this current crisis struck. The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance response, of USAID, and other government agencies, for example, modeled one form of response in the 2014 Ebola outbreak through mobilizing an effective Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) (Widner).

The CSIS Commission report notes significant steps that had been advanced and taken – nationally and internationally – to build capacity, while the report also called for dramatic changes in how the United States prepares for future global health crises. Steps taken or proposed include a diverse array of recent bipartisan Congressional action in response to global biohazard threats, flu, and Ebola, and enactment into law of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act

(PAHPAI) of 2019. The administration itself reorganized pandemic response capabilities at the National Security Council level, generalizing what had been a distinct directorate for global health security into the more broadly based directorate for Weapons of Mass Destruction and Biodefense. The U.S. has worked closely with leadership of the international Global Health Security Agenda (*Governance – Global Health Security Agenda*), generating what the CDC has recognized as five years of progress. (*Key Achievements in Five Years of GHSA*) Coordination with the World Bank and its Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (*PEFF*) is a key global linkage.

Although the U.S. has a track record of focusing on needed capacities to respond to global health emergencies that may threaten others and ourselves, we still need to fill in critical missing pieces, commit greater resources, and provide more effective central leadership and coordination.

Public Diplomacy

It is critical that the United States is able to conduct effective public diplomacy within the governance and capacity building agenda. Public diplomacy and international cultural and academic exchange are America’s face to the world, through which trust is developed and leadership can emerge for meeting global challenges. Existing structures within the U.S. Department of State and other international facing departments for this work are outdated. Experts agree that reforms are needed. The contemporary pressures to take positive advantage of social media and to counteract threats of disinformation, aligned with new global agendas for achieving sustainable development reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), call for new or enhanced approaches. Secretary Pompeo recently called for a new Bureau of Outreach in response to these needs. (*State Department Considering Public Diplomacy Overhaul – Foreign Policy*) A recent Aspen Institute report calls for other modifications to the Department of State to communicate more effectively – including reforms to broadcasting platforms, enhanced capacity for “network diplomacy” including new

public-private-partnership platforms, and support for the United States International Communications Reform Act of 2014 that would revise U.S. international broadcasting and communications structures, missions, and objectives. (Kessler)

Building a new United States' framework for supporting cultural exchange in particular, and public diplomacy broadly, in light of the principles and objectives of global SDGs calls both for new thinking and new partnership structures. Due to the interplay of elements in sustainable development (social, economic, and environmental), it is not possible for either a single agency or even a single sector to address these issues effectively. The social aspect of sustainability, for example, requires a focus on the human element including education, housing, transportation, health, crime, migration, and so forth. The economic element requires a focus on production, appropriate regulations, investment, job creation, raw materials, etc. The environmental element requires a focus on such issues as climate, protection of natural resources, and clean water. Addressing this reality requires inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approaches to build adequate capacity for action.

A broadly conceived public diplomacy agenda builds as well on commitments to advance good governance – with enhanced focus on local governance and civil society. The COVID-19 crisis has made clear the essential importance of strong and collaborative governance capacities at the street level as well as in the high public offices. The public administration academic and technical support community has a role to play at these ground levels, supporting local governments and NGOs, and providing them with technical assistance. Universities can help backstop street-level public administrators globally – such as town clerks, park managers, school administrators, and trade managers, just to name a few – with training in public administration and its best practices. Students can test out, practice and share new ideas to solve issues related to sustainability and other issues.

Public sponsored cultural and academic exchanges are central to this agenda. Cultural exchange engages the capacities of soft power for persuasion and the alignment of values and outcomes. Exchanges expose individuals to different ways of thinking, different beliefs and norms, and

different ways of behaving. Such exposure allows participants to see things differently and provides motivation for them to learn the tools and methods that they need to change their own home countries and achieve social betterment. Improvement in the world's human condition, social improvement, is key to advancing the national interest of the United States (IREX).

Democratic Institutions

It is critical that the United States promotes democratic consolidation globally by supporting and coordinating effort to strengthen state capacities in conjunction with UN Sustainable Development Goals and related Initiatives. As described by Larry Diamond, a challenge faced by many nations is to restrain the predatory tendencies of national leaders by strengthening rules and institutions that subject leaders' actions to public scrutiny and hold them accountable to the law. To do this "requires dense, vigorous civil societies, with independent organizations, mass media, and think tanks, as well as other networks that can foster civic norms, pursue the public interest, raise citizen consciousness, break the bonds of clientelism, scrutinize government conduct, and lobby for good-governance reforms." (Diamond) Countries with fragile governing institutions and weaker democratic traditions are especially vulnerable to predatory leaders.

Autocrats and would-be autocrats use crises such as the global pandemic as opportunities to undermine democratic institutions and human rights. Very often, the actions nations are taking (for example, limiting press freedoms, delaying elections) are at best tangentially related to responding to the crisis. These actions frequently fail a basic test that Keynesians, in a completely different context, use when considering economic stimulus policies--that they need to be "timely, targeted, and temporary" in order to be successful.

Support for fragile states increases global stability and thus contributes vitally to U.S. national security. The U.S. can advance its national interest by supporting effective governance and sustainable development around the globe – both through bilateral aid and in

cooperation with an array of international institutions—including the IMF, the World Bank, UNDP, and the OECD. Among the many complex dimensions that the standards advanced by these institutions express – promotion of rule of law, reduction of corruption, non-discriminatory laws for sustainable development – we focus on two in particular: building institutional capacity for good governance in individual states and establishing productive international and public-private partnerships to support such efforts.

Coordinated action by democratic states to promote accountable government institutions is always difficult and has weakened in the face of other challenges. This weakening threatens our national interest and constitutes a grand challenge to U.S. public administration. We believe it remains a core U.S. interest to endorse and support mutually affirmed international commitments to strengthen state capacities for democratic governance.

Experience with the United Nation’s Millennium Challenge Goals has led to calls for country efforts to pursue long-term public administration reforms, especially those that aim to strengthen public financial management (PFM) in fragile states. This is expressed as UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16: *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*. The UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and others have developed standards for essential capacities and institutional arrangements. (Devex) Countries that align their planning and budgeting with the SDGs also will be able to benchmark their progress against that of peer nations. To date, however, few countries have used the SDGs systematically to reorient public spending or take other steps to make their governing institutions more accountable and inclusive. (“Chapter 3: Sustainable Development Goal 16: Focus on Public Institutions”)

These issues take on intense relevance in the context of fragile states, where weak state capacity or weak state legitimacy leaves citizens vulnerable to a range of shocks, risking both humanitarian catastrophe for

citizens and political openings for enemies of democratic government, international security, and sustainable development. U.S. government policy recognizes this. The current Administration supports the Global Fragility Act of 2019. (*S.727 - 116th Congress (2019-2020): Global Fragility Act of 2019*). The Act calls on federal agencies to develop a ten-year Global Fragility Strategy. A key strategy for this is to strengthen public decision processes and public financial management in fragile states. Implementation would require the President, in coordination with the Secretary of State, the Administrator of USAID, and the heads of other relevant Federal departments and agencies, to develop and pursue coordinated actions to address instability in fragile states.

Management Capacity

It is critical that management capacity at the State Department be increased to enable domestic staff to increase their effectiveness on global issues. Policy studies across the political spectrum have called for a review and reorganization of the structure of the U.S. Department of State. Concerns include a disconnect between Foreign Service officers and political leadership, outdated organizational structure, and inefficient partnerships with other federal agencies. The United States Agency for International Development is similarly hampered by a cumbersome personnel system.

The management challenges for domestic staff at the Department of State and other global facing departments call for effective capacity to reach across the major agencies of government – Treasury, Defense, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security as well as outside of government to private sector and philanthropic partners. The Department of State needs flexible management systems that advance these collaborative efforts.

A period of experimentation with management systems and civil service reform is needed to craft these new management approaches. We are not alone in acknowledging this. Other respected nonpartisan organizations and experienced leaders who have examined these issues

also urge a period of experimentation and priority setting for personnel systems and management capacity at the U.S. Department of State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The U.S. can lead the world in confronting its political, cultural, and risk challenges. We have a unique combination of assets to do so:

- The world’s largest economy;
- A constitutional tradition of democratic government;
- A scientific community that leads in almost every field of discovery;
- Operational and regulatory jurisdiction over the international financial market;
- Unparalleled military power;
- A system and tradition of competent, professional public management operating in challenging settings;
- A globally dominant popular culture; and
- A national heritage of liberty and individual rights.

Some of these assets operate outside of the government, but *none is independent of the government*. To deploy these national assets and position America for the new era, the U.S. government—at all levels and in its many agencies—will need to repurpose and reform. Key institutions of federal administration like the State Department, the Department of Defense, the Treasury, the Departments of Agriculture and Commerce, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency will have to rethink their priorities, adapt their systems, and re-train their staff.

The United States needs new thinking about international development and foreign assistance. Drawing from promising early work in this field and from new models of collaboration, we can build more effective connections between defense, diplomacy and development to tackle themes like stabilization, resilience, and effective interventions in fragile states. There is a need for more and better points of leverage, with and within the private sector, and for 21st Century models of collaboration

between government, non-profit, and faith communities. Both American charities and asset management houses have demonstrated willingness to contribute to global causes. There will also be points of leverage in the array of reformed and re-energized international institutions. However, the credibility of American leadership will depend on how our public service transforms itself.

The Working Group recommends that the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) take the following first steps to trigger further progress:

- Establish a U.S. Global Crises Response Corps, starting immediately with a program focused on health, particularly on COVID-19. This should soon be followed by similar programs on natural disasters, cybersecurity, and other international risks that require coordination and action across borders;
- Establish a National Commission on Cultural Exchange, charged with helping American diplomacy present and represent U.S. values abroad; and
- Develop a presidential-level Sustainable Democratic Institutions Strategy to integrate efforts from across the federal administration.

To enable these and other initiatives, we need to take steps to strengthen and redesign public management capacities for diplomacy and international affairs. As another important first step, we recommend the establishment of a new career path at the State Department that leverages “domestic” staff to increase the government’s cadre and capacity to manage global issues.

Each recommendation is discussed in more detail below.

Recommendation 1: U.S. Global Health Crises Response Corps

As the COVID-19 crisis surrounds U.S. and draws attention, it is important that we not lose sight of our capacities to respond to potential new global health crises or to unusual hotspots. We must stay nimble and have capacities to work flexibly. In line with the CSIS Commission report, the Working Group calls for the **establishment of a U.S. Global Health Crises Response Corps** charged with responsibility to respond rapidly to global health crises in order to meet critical needs and to help frame a national response, to intervene by mobilizing and coordinating appropriate government agency, private sector, and philanthropic partners to take rapid action in the face of global health crises.

Much has been learned from past responses to Ebola threats in Africa, and to SARS in Asia. Much is being learned now about COVID-19. A Global Health Crises Response Corps would be in a position to compile these lessons, align with the varied public agencies necessary for a response, involve private sector and philanthropic partners, and identify further actions needed. The CSIS estimates costs of such an initiative would be about \$50 million a year over five years; leadership might rest either in the CDC or USAID, and its deployment would be jointly conditioned by USAID, CDC, and the State Department, and of course host countries, coordinated by the White House.

We know that crises are inevitably multi-dimensional. We know that in pandemics, the behavior of those who have not yet contracted the disease is just as important as those who are ill. If they are unable to go to the factory, the farm, the market, the school, or the office, the economic impact of the pandemic grows exponentially. The perceived speed and scale of the government's response ("Are they doing something to stop it?") drive street-level decisions. Advance planning and reserve resources structure the character of the government's response.

The Global Health Crises Response Corps would offer a rapid response capability that can both deliver U.S. expertise and resources where crises are emerging, can gauge the scope and breadth of risk from crises, and can learn from interventions and responses of others. It would, in turn, help frame our capacity to respond to the associated economic,

social and political dislocations. We are confident that this rapid response capacity in health would soon be followed by similar programs on natural disasters, cybersecurity, and other international risks that require coordination and action across borders.

Recommendation 2: National Commission on Public Diplomacy, Cultural Exchange, and Sustainable Development

To move in this new direction, the Working Group calls for a **National Commission on Public Diplomacy, Cultural Exchange, and Sustainable Development** charged with exploring and recommending new approaches for public sector and multi-sector initiatives that represent U.S. values abroad and meet sustainable development goals in light of them.

Established as a Presidential Commission under provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (Stuessy), this initiative would engage members of the public, the NGO and philanthropic sectors, and relevant professional associations to help reframe and energize a mission for the future for public diplomacy, and recommend the type of matrix organization best suited for administering these initiatives.

Recommendation 3: Sustainable Democratic Institutions Strategy (SDIS)

Drawing on its democratic traditions and the strength of its governing institutions, the U.S can enhance its collaboration with international institutions and other governments to advance standards of democratic governance while adapting these to a variety of governing systems around the world. Achieving global development goals, particularly those contributing to state capacity to support sustainable development, also calls for new collaborative relationships with corporate leaders, development professionals, and philanthropy to support knowledge development and adoption of best practices.

To do this most effectively, the U.S. government could implement the framework established by the Global Fragility Act. Using procedures established in the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010 for cross-agency priority (CAP) goals, a cross-agency team could be established in 2021 to pursue a Sustainable Democratic Institutions Strategy (SDIS). This would encompass efforts of the Department of State and USAID, along with Departments focused on U.S. commercial, trade, and labor interests, and those engaged with U.S. cultural expression. The cross-agency team would set measurable two-year targets for strengthening fragile states, including metrics for the foundations of democratic governance such as support for the rule of law and civil society as guaranteed for U.S. citizens in the Bill of Rights. The team responsible for achieving this goal would be coordinated at the Presidential level.

Other steps the U.S. should take to strengthen governmental capacity, accountability and rule of law in fragile states include:

- Establish cross-agency standards for monitoring and evaluation by Federal departments and agencies administering foreign assistance as called for in the current Administration’s “Guidelines for monitoring and evaluations of foreign assistance (January 11, 2018, M-18-04)” implementing the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016.
- Extend the principle of conditionality established for the Millennium Challenge program to other foreign assistance programs and condition assistance on adherence to the principles of good governance defined by SDG 16 and the OECD’s principles for public sector governance and institutions.
- Align U.S. efforts with those of other nations and the private sector to achieve the UN’s SDGs, in particular with SDG 16.
- Identify and advance initiatives for public-private and philanthropic partnerships to advance the SDGs.

Recommendation 4: Increase Management Capacity

The challenge is broad; we recognize that there are multiple perspectives on how to develop and guide the professionals who implement U.S. foreign policy. Now is the time for innovative, promptly implemented experimentation within the civil service sector of the State Department to build the robust, nimble civil service we need in the future.

As first steps, we recommend actions that explore greater flexibility in systems for the domestic service—that is, those positions with the Department of State outside of the Foreign Service. These experimental reforms would be foundational, creating capacity within the Department to pursue its mission with greater flexibility and bringing additional focus on areas within its expertise across the government as a whole.

Pilot programs that can make significant change in our management capabilities are well within the authority and the traditions of the public service. Our recommendation is proposed jointly by the American Academy of Diplomacy and the Partnership for Public Service, and a variant is affirmed by analysis from Mark Abramson and his colleagues addressing administrative practice and public sector reform (The American Academy of Diplomacy; Abramson).

This reform proposal focuses on a system that allows greater opportunity for professional growth within the domestic based civil service at the Department of State. It allows flexibility in Civil Service (CS) rotations that draw on current strengths of the Foreign Service rotation system without competing for such positions, thereby creating a more flexible federal workforce within the agency.

The proposal, in the words of the American Academy of Diplomacy:

... would create an exempted service within State's CS. The exempted service, which would be voluntary (no forced placements), would be a new system with many of the attributes and some of the responsibilities of the Foreign Service (FS) except that it would be limited to domestic service, i.e., it would not

compete for overseas jobs. The new service would have regular rotation and rank in person, the latter being essential to allow rotation of jobs and break the direct connection between position and rank. Those in the new system would also acquire time in class requirements.

Our Working Group's proposal would incorporate a principle from the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act embedded in the Senior Executive Service, which establishes the principle of rank-in-person in lieu of rank-in-position. Rank-in-position serves as a barrier to the full development of a strong civilian-based, agile, public service at the Department of State that has the flexibility to build experience and manage events in a cross-agency environment.

As Abramson frames this:

As the number and importance of cross-agency policy goals continue to increase, there is a growing need for experienced civil servants who can move from agency to agency (or goal to goal) and bring their experience to bear in new situations. In many ways, that was the vision for the Senior Executive Service. The experience of the State Department demonstrates that rank-in-person can indeed be an effective tool for administrations to deploy when they need 'cool heads in hot spots.'

CONCLUSION

Each of the recommendations in this report is a fundamental step in its own right and each lays groundwork for more extensive innovation. The Grand Challenge in Public Administration to "advance national interests in a changing global context" has been transformed during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic will change the world forever. Though the new script is not yet written, it is clear that U.S. global strategies must be nimble, that threats to U.S. power and influence will grow, and that our interests and values cannot be advanced alone.

Advance National Interests in a Changing Global Context Working Group

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