

DACOR , USAID Alumni Event
November 18, 2020

Thank you Alex Shakow, not only for that kind introduction, but for all you have done for the USAID Alumni Association. Thanks also to Paul Denig Chair of the DACOR board, John Bradshaw, DACOR's Executive Director, and Christine Skodon DACOR's Communications Director for facilitating this session.

I sense a good deal of relief here today—if it's possible to feel relief virtually! It has been a tough year for our colleagues at USAID. In my discussions with a few of our career friends, they are raring to go with support and advice for the Biden transition team. They are waiting for GSA to release them!

I was asked to address the topic “How Development Fits in a Future National Security Strategy.” That might have been a difficult topic a decade or so ago. Many of the strongest supporters of the Agency preferred to see the development mission exclusively as a reflection of our humanitarianism, not as a tool of national security. Today, there is a consensus that it is both.

That consensus helped the Agency survive an “America First” presidency that recommended 30% cuts in its budget. The transactional and impulsive occupant of the White House eliminated entire country programs in Central America and Ethiopia. He saw foreign aid as a gift to be bestowed or denied at his whim.

Relatively speaking USAID was blessed with solid leadership by Mark Green and bipartisan support on the Hill. Until this past year, the Agency survived by keeping its collective head

under the White House radar. It hasn't been able to do this in the post-Green era.

Keeping one's head down is not a good posture from which to lead internationally, nor to address the huge transnational crises that have resulted largely from underdevelopment: the global health crisis; climate change; the instability, violence and migration that fragile states produce; and the dangerous trend toward authoritarianism.

These are the urgent tests the Biden Administration will face. There will be little time to waste which is why this transition is so important.

There is much that can be done on January 20 by Executive Order. President Biden can restore the Development and Global Health Directorates in the National Security Counsel, eliminate the Mexico City "Global Gag Order," rejoin the WHO and the Paris Agreement... and begin the process of restoring USAID to its status as a premier development agency.

The pandemic has been a wake-up call. It exposed narrow, save- today and spend- tomorrow thinking. The Trump Administration eliminated USAID's "Predict" program in 2019. That program deployed scientists around the world-- including to Wuhan, China—where they were tracking pathogens from animals to humans.

At a time when we desperately needed that early warning system the program was shut down. Earlier, the White House office designed to plan for potential pandemics was eliminated.

Those decisions were not only penny wise and pound foolish, they have cost over 240,000 American lives. American

leadership in global health, always respected, was lost. Instead, we now lead in new infections and deaths. This was a national security breach of major proportions.

In my day at USAID-- in the period following the end of the Cold War-- our efforts to promote development cooperation as a function of national security fell mostly on deaf ears. I vividly recall the reaction I received when I wrote a Washington Post OPED arguing that conditions that derive from underdevelopment constituted a threat.

Investments in development were needed, I wrote, to *prevent* violent conflict, destabilizing migration and environmental damage. Surprisingly, I had precipitated an internal debate.

Two weeks later, another OPED appeared arguing that it wasn't conditions that created national security threats, it was terrorists and undemocratic governments acting against our interests. These threats, it was said, could best be countered with hardnosed diplomacy and, if necessary, military force.

Those two legs of the triad were important, but I believed that the third leg was vastly understated--the one charged with prevention.

Over the past decades, our political consensus has shifted dramatically. Leaving aside the idiosyncratic Trump Administration, we now embrace a "3-D" concept of national security. Often it has been retired military and defence officials like Bob Gates, that have promoted the idea that diplomacy *and* development are needed—and should be significantly strengthened—in the name of national security.

It now remains for a new Biden Administration to act on this consensus. I have no doubt that it will.

The American development community has been very active during this campaign and into the transition period.

A group called “International Development Professionals for Biden” has made its recommendations.

The Brookings Institution under the leadership of George Ingram has published a superb report.

Interaction has proposed a list of “human-centered fundamentals for poverty-focused development.”

The Stimson Center has opined on food security.

Individuals like Anne Marie Slaughter, Jonathon Addleton, Alonzo Fulgham, Jeff Marburg-Goodman and Andrew Natsios have written thought-provoking opinion articles.

I joined with Paula Tufro on a piece called “Why Development Matters.”

Many of the members of the USAID Alumni Association have contributed their ideas. There is no shortage of advice!

The ideas advanced range from the necessary to the practical to the ideal. Let’s focus on the necessary.

When President-elect Biden assumes office on January 20, he will be faced with a major public health and economic crisis. This is not just a domestic crisis. It is a global one, and you cannot fix one by ignoring the other.

The Biden transition has already recognized this and has announced that the US will rejoin the World Health Organization, and join COVAX, the alliance of vaccine producers committed to distributing vaccines equitably, including to developing countries.

USAID will be instrumental in implementing this distribution effort and it will have to be ready to do so on day one. The Agency has long had experience creating the cold chains needed to deliver vaccine to remote areas.

This is no easy task and it will mean all hands on deck. USAID will not have the luxury of compartmentalizing its operations.

This pandemic is undoing years of development progress, creating food security issues, undermining job creation efforts, setting back education and overwhelming fragile healthcare systems. During this battle with the Covid virus, development officers usually engaged in longterm projects may find themselves working on what is essentially a humanitarian relief endeavor.

USAID has long been working on the causes of climate change even though it hasn't labelled these programs in this way. The words weren't even allowed in the Trump Administration.

Now it is time to step up and create a visible effort to lead the world in making the Paris Agreement meaningful. As it has in the past in programs like "Feed the Future" and "Power Africa," USAID can mobilize donor support for the climate mitigation and adaptation programs that will enable developing countries to contribute to the Paris goals.

The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance has done a great job in helping vulnerable countries prepare for natural disasters. These complex tragedies-- virulent storms, floods, forest fires and drought—are the manifestations of climate change. OFDA's resilience efforts should be enhanced and openly promoted as climate change mitigation programs.

USAID's development professionals should be providing technical assistance to countries that are fashioning policies to limit greenhouse gas emissions and preserving sequestration sinks. Other donors are already active in this field and the US can give these programs a global boost by publicizing them.

The wave of populism and authoritarianism in the West has also hit the developing world. Freedom House reports that 64 countries have seen a deterioration of political rights and civil liberties in what they call a "leaderless struggle for democracy."

The Biden Administration wants to fill that vacuum. President-elect Biden has committed his administration to organizing a Summit of Democracies. USAID can contribute to that Summit by mobilizing assistance from many donors for democratic development work.

The key issue here for development professionals is *accountability*. We have embraced the effectiveness principle of local ownership. That means more than just government ownership, it means societal ownership.

It means people power. It means gender equality, respect for diversity, LGBT rights and productive lives for the disabled.

Democratic governance isn't just a traditional American aspiration, it is a practical necessity if sustainable development is to be achieved.

Finally, we need a renewed commitment to fragile states. These poorest-of-the-poor nation states are not just security problems, they are places where disease is pervasive and violent conflict is a way of living, and dying. It is no surprise that these densely populated societies are hemorrhaging refugees.

A few years back at the Development Effectiveness Forum in Busan, Korea, these failing states made a request for special treatment by donor nations. They called it a "New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States." The essence of the commitment was to undertake "fragility assessments" and to consider the special context of these troubled societies. Human security was seen as the vital first priority.

Helping these countries represents high risk as results are slow in coming and some waste is inevitable. But abandoning these societies means ignoring the causes of the transnational challenges we face. We need a program with special dispensations to accept the risks of mitigating the worst outcome—a return to conflict-- and beginning a transition to development progress. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives has a special role to play here.

President-elect Biden made a commitment to a fragile area near our border in the Northern Triangle nations of Central America. He wants \$4 billion over four years to help these nations battle corruption and the gangs that undermine governance and create refugees. That will place USAID on yet another front line.

That is quite an agenda for an Agency that has suffered personnel losses and underwhelming White House support for the past four years. It is clearly time to “build back better.”

Let us assume then that USAID finds itself in a lead role in confronting the four global challenges I have discussed. What will it need to succeed?

First, effective and empowered leadership. I agree with those who believe that an Administrator should be named very early on. That person should be given cabinet status and a seat at the National Security Council.

There are several reasons why this formulation is more compelling now than ever before:

1. The transnational issues the US must grapple with are essentially caused by underdevelopment.
2. The US can no longer afford a fractionalized approach to these challenges with 30-plus agencies dabbling in development work. The White House/NSC is a necessary coordination point, but so is an empowered agency that has the standing, the expertise and missions on the ground.
3. The Agency will have to play a role in mobilizing the entire donor community, multilateral and bilateral. This is *development diplomacy* and it will engage State and Treasury, but it will also require the development expertise that resides at USAID to operate within international forums to coordinate, mobilize and even promote development through resolutions like the Sustainable Development Goals.

USAID will need the expertise it will take to gain respect in these functional fields within the US Government and beyond. Much of that talent already exists but should be augmented by mid-career hires and secondments.

In my day that expertise resided in a Global Bureau. I believe it was called E-3 in the Obama Administration. The concept of housing technical competence in offices within a single bureau was to connect missions to the knowledge they needed. Today, that mission should be expanded to enable the Agency to take a lead role internationally.

Taking a lead on these global issues doesn't mean abandoning country programs. The world continues to be organized on the basis of sovereignty, and, while national boundaries are being compromised daily by global problems, they cannot be ignored.

We should also encourage more regional programming, but that will require the acquiescence of regional institutions and national governments.

USAID missions are vital parts of country teams and Mission Directors should be designated by Ambassadors as the coordinators for all development projects in country as is recommended in the Brookings report. In partnership with partner governments and societies, strategic priorities should be agreed consistent with the SDGs. US Government agencies working in country should have to rationalize their activity in the context of that strategy.

Other US Government agencies have valuable expertise and that should be utilized, but within a developmental framework employing effectiveness principles that have stood the test of time.

These agencies are rightly supporting their primary, domestic missions. Sometimes those missions overlap with development objectives, but not always. Development agencies, including the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the new International Development Finance Corporation, have a different orientation. They exist to help their foreign partners succeed.

The stakes have never been higher given the state of the world. The United States has always been a leader in this field. We can be again if we build back better and organize around the talent and the institutional knowledge that we know exists.

Sustainable development is national security in that it protects Americans from disease, violent conflict and climate-related disasters. It is humanitarian in that it not only saves lives, it enhances life. It is the right thing to do in that reflects our national values.

Fortunately, we have elected a President who accepts these truths and will act on them.