
Hard Truths, Soft Power

A Transcript From *The Forum's* Podcast
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ELIZABETH DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: How does one country get another country to do what it wants? Typically, when we think about a state pursuing its interests, we think about the projection of hard power: the deployment of coercive tactics using military or economic might. Country A might launch an embargo, sanction or military strike on Country B if the latter threatens the former's interests or values to an unacceptable degree. But hard power is far from the only type of influence employed by states to achieve their goals. Less overt



The *TwentyTwenty* Podcast brings listeners' attention to how the year 2020 has accelerated global trends made all the more visible by the ongoing global crisis. It is currently hosted by Fletcher students **Elizabeth Dykstra-McCarthy** and **Jonathan Regnier**, and produced in partnership with The Fletcher School and Foreign Brief, a geopolitical risk analysis organization. The views expressed in this podcast transcript are solely those of the speakers, and have been edited for clarity.

Dr. Monica Toft is a professor of International Relations at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Minorities at Risk Task Report, and the Political Instability Task Force. Among other specializations, Dr. Toft focuses on civil wars, ethnic violence and the relationship between demography and security.

Dr. Inderjeet Parmar is a professor of International Politics at City University London, the former president of the British International Studies Association, and a regular commentator on U.S. domestic and foreign politics. Dr. Parmar also focuses on American Empire and how race relations and human rights affect the U.S.' ability to project power and pursue its interests abroad. All of this at home and abroad hinges on how the United States values, or says it values, its core principles, like upholding democracy and human rights.

than military might or economic size, but still exceedingly important, is the role of soft power, a state's ability to co-opt rather than coerce. Countries can, and often do, get what they want through attraction. For decades, the United States has been one of the preeminent soft powers. America's ability to co-opt other countries stems from the strength of its academic institutions, its stated commitment to democracy and human rights, the dominance of Hollywood and the American music industry, its diplomatic efforts, its sports leagues, the financial supremacy of Wall Street and the concurrent perceptions of American wealth. However, American soft power has been steadily declining, particularly among traditional U.S. allies, a trend accelerating since the election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016, which threatened the role it played throughout the 20th century as the hegemonic leader of the globalized liberal democratic world.

Pulling out of the Paris Agreement undercut the diminishing American hegemony as the United States stepped back from leading the charge against the world's greatest challenge, a trend that shook other multilateral bodies, like the World Trade Organization and World Health Organization. Today, as COVID-19 runs rampant throughout the United States, the leader in worldwide infections, the White House still continues to deny the prevalence and severity of the violence.

Likewise, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Jacob Blake and countless other Black Americans at the hands of police, on top of the centuries of persistent systematic inequality that has plagued Black America, has damaged U.S. credibility when it seeks to chastise others for human rights abuses: a reality laid bare by Washington's attempts to criticize Beijing for its treatment of the weaker population.

The violent, concerning authoritarian crackdowns by federal and local law enforcement in response to Black Lives Matter protests have called into question U.S. commitment to democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, unequivocally lowering its esteem in the eyes of the liberal democratic world and empowering authoritarians, such as Belarus' Alexander Lukashenko, to crack down on the civil liberties of their own citizens. Will American soft power ever return to its former glory? If not, does Washington risk further alienating allied states and most gravely, if the United States is no longer able to co-opt other countries with the ease it once did, might it resort more and more to coercion?

DR. MONICA TOFT: You want to see influence as sort of a partnership between soft power and hard power, or military power, right? And in an ideal world, what you would hope is that soft power is preeminent—that

you're using powers of persuasion. For example, in economic trade, you can open up "favored nation" status with countries, rather than sort of club them over the head to get them to do what you need them to do, like to stop sort of predateding or enacting trade wars, for example. Another example is to invite leaders to be educated in your country. One of the biggest ways in which the United States—and by the way, the United Kingdom as well—has sort of curried favor through the use of soft power is through its higher educational systems. Think of it as a synergistic relationship, where you really do want to try and start with soft power. And then if that doesn't work, you can threaten the material or the hard power. It's part of the set of tools that the United States has for conducting its foreign relations.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *But the balance between soft and hard power is just that: a balance, and sometimes it falls out of equilibrium. This was the case in 1990, when U.S. diplomatic and economic efforts to keep Iraq from occupying neighboring Kuwait failed. In response, hard power was called into play and the United States, along with a coalition of thirty-nine other countries, used military force to expel Iraq from Kuwait. And, since the 1990s, it seems that the U.S. military industrial complex has dominated more and more in foreign policy decision making.*

TOFT: This phenomenon really didn't start taking off until after the 1990s, and I would say into the 2000s. It is at this point where we really start seeing the United States becoming very interventionist—and in fact, in my writings, I talked about it being
hyper-interventionist—where it's often resorting to the use of force. And what's unnerving is that after 2001 and 9/11, we see not only a continued and increased use of force, but an intensification of the kind of force that the United States uses. So why it's a mystery is that at this point, yes, we were facing jihadist struggles around the world, right? 9/11 was horrific for this country, thousands of people died.

How is it that the United States has become so militaristic and hyper interventionist, to the point where we're actually not relying on our other tools of statecraft, including sanctions?

But if you look at the magnitude and the number of interventions that the United States perpetuates, from the post 9/11 period, you really can't make the argument that this was an existential threat to the United States in the same way that Soviet Union was, with a nuclear arsenal that can sort of

justify the amount of use of force that we're witnessing today. How is it that the United States has become so militaristic and hyper interventionist, to the point where we're actually not relying on our other tools of statecraft, including sanctions? We do use them, but we don't use them as effectively as we might. But I think diplomacy is more important than sanctions. Particularly in the Trump administration, we've really seen a downsizing of the State Department and diplomacy, and it's quite worrisome.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *Agree. There have been fewer applicants to the Foreign Service, fewer posts filled abroad, and a lack of Under Secretaries of State on critical areas like nuclear security.*

TOFT: We've now developed this sort of more reactionary foreign policy, sort of a "whack-the-mole" strategy, where we only have one tool—which is the military—to help us to try to influence states and non-state actors around the world. The only tool we have at this point that we're willing to use is force. And the problem with this is, it's a very dull blade to use when you're going and trying to advance U.S. national interests and/or protect the interests of allies.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *But this interventionism and the diplomatic and economic lashing out of the now-outgoing Trump administration has surely harmed America's soft power standing and its esteem in the eyes of other states. Do other foreign actors view Washington in the way that you've described, that the United States is trying to make the world a better place? How does that impact America's most important strategic alliances?*

TOFT: During the Cold War, indeed, I think that our allies respected that the United States was trying to build and maintain a liberal order that was going to be good for capitalism and trade, and it was going to, first and foremost, try to protect human rights. Now we're at a point in the United States where we have an administration that itself is poking holes at that liberal order. So, the system is really under quite a bit of challenge now. So much so that if you look at surveys coming out of Gallup and Pew, you see that our allies view us as a threat. I mean, in some ways the United States is now, too, seen as a rogue state.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *Nor is it just poking holes in the liberal order abroad. As Dr. Toft will discuss, the basics of civil military relations should set out that civilians are in control of the military. The military follows orders.*

Historically, the military has been apolitical. But Trump has clearly challenged this notion.

TOFT: People are becoming worried. What is striking is that this President seems to think that the military, because it is under his control, it's his military, right? Therefore, it should be able to do any bidding that he wants. And so that's a bit unnerving when, you know, he's asking the military to do things that they shouldn't do. He doesn't fully seem to understand—but thankfully, people around him do—that you can't just deploy troops or federal forces when you want to, which is what we're seeing with protests.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *In particular, Trump's words this year have displayed a little respect for the principle of "Posse Comitatus," an 1878 federal law which limits the power of the government to deploy troops against American citizens. Words alone till now, but that is enough to spread ripples of fear.*

TOFT: What it's doing is sort of putting into play the possibility that he doesn't recognize that the military should be apolitical, that it's there to defend the Constitution. Yes, he is the Commander in Chief, but people are nervous—what happens if one, two, or three generals decide, "Okay, Trump is the Commander in Chief, and I'm going to go ahead and follow those orders"—when those orders are actually illegal?

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *Now, the outsized role of the military in Washington's foreign policy is accompanied with an outsized role of the military at home. Nowhere has this been more visually vivid than in the National Guard assuming a larger role in maintaining the peace amid protests this summer.*

TOFT: And we have seen this unfolding recently with the protesters and the kinds of tactics that are being used, and also the language that is being used—that people are being seen as enemies and opponents. No, no, these are fellow citizens, and these are fellow citizens who are demonstrating. Unless they step out of line and do a criminal act, you want to use policing tactics, you don't want to use militaristic tactics. That line now has become blurred. I don't think we fully crossed it yet. I think the fact that we're having that conversation, and that people are aware of it, is promising, and let's hope that our policymakers are smart enough to get in front of this before it's too late.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *The danger is that actions like this communicate to other countries that the United States endorses military tactics and equipment*

used domestically and even on civilians. The assault on peaceful protesters in Lafayette Square in Washington in June prompted many former military leaders to speak out and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley, later apologized for wearing battle fatigues while inspecting the military hardware that was sent to Washington to combat the protests.

TOFT: And right now, why I'm optimistic is that all military officials and elites, I mean, the top commanders, understand this and respect this notion. Countries collapse sometimes, and we have coups sometimes, because in some countries, militaries don't respect that, or they get in bed with sibling authorities. So, we're not there yet. But people are nervous about it because this administration, this President, seems to think that he can use the military in a way that it is not designed to be, and in a way in which the Constitution doesn't actually allow.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *All of this is happening adjacent to a time where there is increasing civil unrest and frustration, stark partisanship and questions about violence erupting between now in January, and frankly, beyond.*

TOFT: I teach a class on civil wars, and we look at all the risk factors for a civil war—and the United States has several right now. The number one risk factor is a prior history of civil war. And you could say, "Well, the Civil War was 160 years ago, you know, a long time ago." But the other factor that's kind of unnerving is factionalization of elites. And we know that our country, the United States, is at its deepest, most polarized that it's been for a long time. So, I am a bit unnerved.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *Recent coverage of militia groups, often white supremacists or those opposing coronavirus restrictions, has often found that as many as 25% of the groups are composed of veterans, and a very small proportion of the U.S. population actually serves in the military—roughly half a percent—which is quite a jump. Despite President Trump's insistence that the threat of Antifa and its far-left terrorist plots is the priority, far-right terrorist plots have outnumbered those by both the far-left and religious groups for almost every year for the last twenty-five years. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other intelligence services, these military groups also pose the greatest threat to U.S. national security—even more so than foreign terrorist groups. This is especially the case in the wake of President-elect Joe Biden's victory, which many of Trump's most ardent supporters, particularly in these militias, view as fraudulent theft of an election. And there have been calls*

among these groups, on Facebook and other platforms, to take up arms against what they view as an illegitimate incoming administration.

TOFT: As an example, there was a scheme to kidnap the governor of Michigan by six militia members—it's quite scary. So now they're going after politically elite politicians. And so, the FBI had the intelligence to take down this group that was going to kidnap the governor of Michigan because they disagree with her policies over the COVID-19 crisis.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *And the language from Trump to "Liberate Michigan" clearly gives tacit support to these groups. The ability to view white anti-government militia members as domestic terrorists, and to charge them as domestic terrorists, is still a challenge for some lawmakers to accept and clearly doesn't always align with their political agenda.*

Dangerously, American bureaucracy is becoming politicized, demonstrated by Trump's attacks on civil service institutions, such as the FBI and the U.S. Postal Service. Days after the election, Trump continues to delegitimize the results. He has encouraged his supporters to monitor polling places. It is not inconceivable that he would encourage resistance to the incoming administration.

TOFT: The Trump administration doesn't seem to respect boundaries and borders between the different military forces and police forces. But my sense is that the institutions are holding. So, I think it's really contingent on the current Trump administration and whether it continues its dog whistles of racism, calling out telling people to, "Stand back and stand by," and how desperately this administration tries to hang on to power. We've already witnessed violence some people talk about, we're already in a slow-moving revolution. It's just a slow violence revolution. I don't think we're going to have large scale violence, because again, I think it's only a small minority that's perpetrating this. But, I have seen systems tip. Institutions and systems can only take so much pressure before they tip.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *This worrying rise in authoritarianism domestically, which again, has not been only condoned, but actively encouraged by the White House, must have an effect on American credibility as a state that values civil rights, liberal democracy and political freedoms, necessarily harming the strength of its soft power. Do there seem to be indications that these trends could be emboldening autocrats around the world to further consolidate their holds on power?*

TOFT: Yes, there is. This goes back to the beginning of our conversation about soft power. How the United States treats its own citizens is a reflection of who it is as a nation. And if we're not treating our citizens equitably, equally, fairly, with due process, then indeed, others outside the United States may take that as a signal that they can actually perpetrate sort of

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human rights violations against their own population. We don't have the higher ground at that point. I think we have to do a lot of introspection as a country now, to really look at the Black Lives Matter movement especially. I really hope that we have some transfor-

mation here, that we hold police forces to account, and that we understand that there is structural racism. How else can we be seen as a credible force for upholding basic human rights of citizens, domestically and internationally? And we've seen that, you know, the Russian Federation and China, they will say, "Look at how you treat your minority populations, we treat them the same way."

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *The plight of the Uyghur in China springs immediately to mind, but so does that of the Chechens in the Russian Federation, as well as numerous indigenous groups. In both cases, China and Russia have deflected criticism, citing America's treatment of its minority populations.*

TOFT: And so, I do think that we want to get our house in order so that we can be sort of that beacon on the hill, and can actually stand up and honestly say, "Yes, we're not perfect, but by gosh, we are really trying. And we recognize that we have inequities in this society, but we have a justice system that we're making better and we're really going to try to remedy the system because every citizen in this country deserves to have its basic rights and civil liberties protected."

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *Questions of America's genuine commitment to freedom are applied to far more than just its foreign policy. Domestically, questions of race, equality and justice have dominated American politics and media this year. But this is far from a new question. Nor is it the first time that the questions of race and justice within the United States have impacted the way it is perceived outside. Simply put, what happens at home doesn't stay at home. American domestic politics, particularly questions of racial inequalities, neces-*

sarily have a bearing on how it is viewed abroad, thereby affecting the strength and diversity of its foreign policy toolbox.

DR. INDERJEET PARMAR: There is a very strong commitment, ideologically and in terms of values—democratic values—to things like human rights, to promoting a positive culture, economic development, modernization, and so on. And there is a kind of evangelical feeling that the United States is a very advanced country, with an advanced economy and advanced culture, and that they genuinely believe that they want to improve the world. And I think they believe that they have the power to do so. Unfortunately, there is also another side of American power, which is far more coercive in character.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *Actions speak louder than words, and Washington's actions occasionally suggests it cares little about upholding human rights and democracy, especially when those conflict with material or geopolitical interests. But the Global South, or the geopolitical periphery, sees a fundamentally different face of U.S. power projection, than does the Global North, and Washington's traditional allies.*

PARMAR: In the “third world” in particular, and in the Global South, the coercive face of American power is the much more open face of it, the one which is most widely seen and recognized. And the soft power is much more targeted to Western, allied states. So, I would say that there is a kind of racialized character to the way in which American power operates. If you're living in Pakistan, and Waziristan, for example, and your family has been attacked with drones, and, you know, loads of people have been killed, the United States has completely denied it. And it then has all this stuff about human rights around the world and how it's a champion of freedom, or democracy and so on, which people are going to be very, very cynical about it. On the other hand, they don't expect too much from the United States in that regard. They don't see as hypocritical. And you see, that's what America is. America is true to what it really stands for.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *America being true to what it stands for certainly wouldn't have been the phrase that flashed through many of our minds as we looked at the footage of protests and police response, the furious criticisms levied at society at large around race relations and the persistent inequality, economic, social and political, that has existed since the country's founding. If human rights were one pillar of the Constitution, slavery was another.*

PARMAR: Race is a very powerful factor within the history of the United States, but it's not the only factor. I think that class—and racialized class—is also a fundamental factor and truth of U.S. history and its political and economic development. Particularly after the Second World War, when you've had a war against a racial ideology of superiority, the domestic practices of American race, particularly in the deep South, but elsewhere as

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well, are suddenly in the global gaze, because the United States says it stands against colonialism, and it wants to recruit the post-colonial states, which are leaving France and Britain, the British Empire. So, in the Cold War period, in particular, what the world is looking to see is change in the United

States. By the time you get to the late 1950s and into the 1960s, when large numbers of countries in Africa in particular are becoming independent and are represented in the United Nations. They then turn up in New York and Washington, DC, where they basically are unable to rent a house, stay in a hotel, eat in a restaurant, or get a coffee in their drive up from DC embassies to the UN buildings in New York City. In the struggle for hearts and minds in the post-colonial world, America's domestic race relations, and the Jim Crow segregation of the deep south, suddenly becomes a global issue.

And the Soviet Union and China are saying, "This is what you're signing up to, if you sign up with the United States in the United Nations." And in effect that served as a very, very large roadblock and a barrier to accepting the United States was serious about anti-colonialism and rights of Africans and Asians and other people. I would argue in the Cold War in particular, race played a very, very powerful role. And people still look today at domestic race relations as a barometer of the kind of progress the United States has made on that front.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *And as the military industrial complex has grown, we've seen the militaristic foreign policy chickens come home to roost. To citizens of almost any high income and developed country, police departments throughout the United States look more militaristic than civilian. In the twenty years from 1997, more than \$4 billion worth of surplus or outdated military equipment was transferred from the U.S. Department of Defense to police forces throughout the country—and not just big city police departments like New York or Los Angeles, but small-town outfits—take Keene, New Hampshire, for*

example. Eight years ago, Keene accepted a grant of nearly \$300,000 from the Department of Homeland Security to purchase a Bearcat armored personnel carrier: effectively a tank without the cannon. The move raised eyebrows—if not concerns—around the country. For what possible reason, could the police department of Keene, a town of just 23,000 people that saw only two murders between the years of 1999 and 2012, need an eight-ton military vehicle? But Keene is not alone. Since the Clinton era in particular, police militarization, the use of military equipment and tactics by domestic law enforcement has become the norm rather than the exception. In fact, Dr. Toft illustrated this very issue in our conversation.

TOFT: Just to relate a personal story, I remember when the Boston Marathon bombing happened. I just remember when they shut down Watertown, Cambridge, and Somerville, and they had armored vehicles right in residential neighborhoods. It was quite shocking for me to watch the news and then to talk to news media about that. It looked to me like a war zone. And it was to individuals, yes, they had perpetrated a horrific crime, a terrorist act. But the idea that the entire area surrounding Boston gets shut down with armored vehicles seemed a bit overkill. Now the police in charge of his operation say, “Look, we got our suspects, we managed to get our suspects.” But, we always want to ask—at what cost? Could we have done it without this sort of hyper-militarization?

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *With that image in our minds, back to Inderjeet Parmar. The militarization of police and concomitant use of warlike force disproportionately affects marginalized communities, worsening race relations, leading to a weakened image of the United States overseas as an upholder of liberal democracy. Is America disqualified from criticizing its adversaries for their crackdowns on civil liberties, when it has similar issues and has employed comparable tactics?*

PARMAR: Philosophically, it is certainly viable. If you are yourself guilty of gross violations of the kind that we have seen over the last several years, it diminishes your moral authority to take any kind of moral high ground against anybody else. But we know that states don’t tend to take those kinds of positions, they only take the positions they think that they can get away with. And when it comes to turning that on, it can be very effective. Of course, it diminishes your authority when you can be accused of hypocrisy, and lots of people see hypocrisy in American support of Israel or support of Saudi Arabia, but then identifying Cuba, Venezuela, or China as gross violators. And so, they tend to stop listening.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *Hypocrisy has been a particular charge levied at the United States. But you've suggested that the rest of the world might not see recent behavior as hypocrisy so much as the reality of how America operates. Did the Trump administration actually change the ways in which the United States exercises its power, soft or hard?*

PARMAR: That is why a lot of people say Trump isn't a hypocrite. In fact, he's honest. He says, "This is how it is. We have the power. You don't, so we're going to squeeze you. We're going to coerce you. We're going to weaponize the dollar, we're going to put sanctions against you if you do something that we don't like, and we're going to do this to everybody when it comes to America first." So they say, "Yeah, that's it. He's honest." They may not like it, but they're saying, "Now you're seeing what we have seen for many, many decades. This is the real America. This is what your whole world is now seeing." And in a way, I think Europe is probably seeing it in the most brutal forms for the first time in seventy years, that the United States is now extracting value from every relationship. And President Trump is doing it in a very crude and transactional way.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *This new face of American power projection is, at least in the eyes of the global periphery, not so much hypocrisy as it is the true face of America, the removal of an unequivocally pro-democracy, pro-human rights facade. What traditional allies might see as hypocrisy is a side of American corruption and coercion that has historically been reserved for the global periphery in say, Latin America or Sub-Saharan Africa. Might this pivot towards crude mercenary transactionality, at least with traditional allies, represent a potentially irreversible shift in the way in which the United States pursues its foreign policy?*

PARMAR: The rise of the rest—the emerging, or re-emerging powers like India and China, Brazil and others—they have their independent ideas about the world. And now they have independent national interest. And they have a lot of a lot of economic power, too. Their markets are much more attractive, there are places for foreign investment to make lots of money, and they have a lot more self-confidence. And their levels of nationalism have also increased.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *How might the incoming Biden administration, if at all, work to re-cultivate American soft power, improving America's image abroad?*

PARMAR: There will be a change in the rhetoric, a change in the mood music, and there will be many more foreign aid-type programs. I think the United States will have a much more positive attitude for multilateralism. But, I think the world has changed, and the United States is no longer able to exercise as much power as it once did. But I think the Democratic Party has fought most of the major wars during the 20th century and into the 21st century as well, and I don't think that's fundamentally going to change, especially as they just wrote in a \$740 billion military budget last week.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. soft power had been slipping. Can American soft power, its ability to court and co-opt, others bounce back from these last eight months and these last four years more generally?*

PARMAR: A lot of what President Trump has done has been through Executive Orders. A lot of that is reversible, just like Trump reversed a lot of Barack Obama's Executive Orders. So, Joe Biden will be able to reverse quite a large number of the memberships of international bodies, the Human Rights Council, the World Health Organization, the Iran nuclear agreement, and the resurrection of those is fundamental.

DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *And how might this crisis affect the balance of soft power more generally?*

PARMAR: Soft power is going to rise again, if the major powers like China, the United States, and other powers as well can sit down together, in places like the World Health Organization,
and actually pool their resources. One
of the key lessons of the pandemic is
that the state has had to step back in. It
has been forced to get back into health
care in a way, just as it's been forced to
take a much greater role in providing a
basic income—the state can't just step back. The state is back whether you
like it or not, the government has to take responsibility. And I think that in
and of itself is a big change in world politics.

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DYKSTRA-MCCARTHY: *The future American soft power standing could very well hinge on the actions of the Biden administration, though irreparable*

damage has undoubtedly been done. It is unknown how the next few weeks will play out. President Trump's concession, lawsuits around the electoral process, public unrest, the integrity of American democratic institutions, and with them, America's reputation as a beacon of democracy seemed to be on the line. Does it want to be a "Beacon on the Hill" for the rest of the world to emulate? Or would it rather focus on its own interests, continue the trend set by the Trump administration of treating all relationships as extractive and transactional? The last four years have exposed wounds in the American political fabric, and 2020 has poured salt in them. Should the United States decide to reclaim its role as the global "City on the Hill," the country must first get its own house in order if it wants to maintain any semblance of credibility when proselytizing its values. For that to happen, however, a national reckoning over the country's history and the idea of collective responsibility, what America owes to its citizens, is sorely needed. Police militarization, widening social and economic inequalities, racial justice, and an increasingly threatened and politicized civil service, are all critical areas for introspection. As we have asked, do the wars that the United States wages abroad come home, and do the conflicts on U.S. soil have impacts beyond its borders?

These trends long predate 2020, though Trump has certainly catalyzed their accelerations. As 2020 comes to a close, and the United States beats on into politically and constitutionally uncharted waters, American soft power is likely to be judged less on how the country interacts with the rest of the world, and more on how it interacts with itself. As it slowly abandons its place at the helm of global issues, other countries will step forward, precipitating many of the outcomes America has tried so hard to prevent, such as the indefatigable rise of China. If America continues to tear down its democratic institutions and norms, how will the world shift to defend the beacons of democracy and civil rights if those experiments are to continue? f