

## International Education for Presidential Candidates

**T**HOSE OF US INVOLVED IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION have a special leadership role to play in touting the great contribution intercultural learning makes to a more peaceful world. As citizen leaders from around the world, we have an opportunity to influence our fellow citizens as they make decisions about our political leadership.



Whether you are an international educator from the United States or from another nation, these are deeply troubling times for those of us who want to see the United States act, as it has so often in the past, as a leader for peace and understanding. We were a superpower whose exceptionalism led our government to promote the United Nations, the Bretton Woods organizations, the human rights movement, the democratic revolution, and humanitarianism itself. There was always the risk that exceptionalism mixed with hubris could take us in a very different direction. And it has.

Today the U.S. government is being called to account by old friends and new foes who resent its unilateral effort to impose its will. Even as we begin to see the U.S. State Department attempt to move back toward more accommodating positions, we suffer the hangover of policies that were based on the imposition of raw power. Never in our history has anti-Americanism been such a powerful reality in the international community.

In a recent lecture for the DACOR organization (made up of retired diplomats), former Ambassador Charles Freeman put it this way:

We are now known internationally more for our recalcitrance than our vision. We have sought

to exempt ourselves from the jurisdiction of international law.... We no longer participate in the UN body charged with the global promotion of human rights. We decline to discuss global climate change, nuclear disarmament, or the avoidance of arms races in outer space. If we have proposals for a world more congenial to the values we espouse, we no longer articulate them. The world is a much less promising place for our silence and absence.

What can we do to reverse this sad state of affairs? For one thing, we can demand that the current crop of presidential candidates acknowledge our sad present-day reality and tell us what they plan to do about it.

In my view, the answer is most certainly not more of the same aggressive unilateralism. Neither is it to turn our back on the world and the role we have played traditionally in promoting the rule of law, human rights, and democracy.

Our policy positions in this world, if they are to have merit, must be informed by the international community, by societies and individuals who have different histories, cultures, religions, and languages. Only when we listen to the discourse of others do we avoid huge mistakes and succeed in effectively pursuing our own values and interests.

Diplomacy in an era when our closest allies must respond to the impulses of democratic polities requires deftness, political acumen, and subtlety. Rhetoric matters. Hubris coming from the remaining superpower is so much louder to the ears of foreign audiences than it is to American ears. Those of us who have had an intercultural learning experience know this.

## What then should we look for in a presidential candidate?

I have a few suggestions for the qualities we should desire in an aspirant to the presidency.



### *Listen to their analyses and characterization of global issues.*

Most political leaders like to personalize threats to our national well-being. Thus, you will hear much about the world's evil personalities. Some will look with fear to a future when we may be challenged by an emerging superpower, like China.

Direct threats to our security are legitimate concerns and they deserve the attention of serious national security think-

ers—so long as we do not succumb entirely to fear and then create negative self-fulfilling prophecies. China is a good example. Because of its growing wealth and its large population, China, the doomsday thinkers would say, has the potential to be an enemy; therefore, we must prepare for this potential threat; then, as we prepare for the worst, China becomes our enemy.

We need not accept that prophecy. If we can find common ground with China through engagement and intercultural exchange—as many of our universities are now doing—we can develop the seeds of enduring respect and lasting friendship.

Another dimension of analysis we should look for is an expressed awareness that conditions on the ground matter.

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the ratio of rich to poor countries based on per capita incomes was about one to six. Today, it is one to fifty! Almost half the world's population lives in poverty.

This is a dangerous condition. Poverty spawns infectious disease, destroys nature, and undermines the human spirit. Social cohesion and any prospect for achieving a stable society are lost, and the greater the resource deprivation is, the stronger the correlation to the level of violence.

This global economic disparity is painfully obvious to the world's poor. Very few of this fast-growing segment of the world's population will become terrorists, but a few terrorists can do great damage. Others will become refugees and displaced people,

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moving from unstable regions to stable ones. Many will carry disease across borders. Others will engage in violent activities in support of their religion, ethnic group, or nation.

There is a debate going on in foreign policy circles over whether we should strive for a more democratic world, or, alternatively, for a more stable world. Whatever your own view on this issue, we should all embrace a renewed commitment to mitigate the effects of poverty. Both ends—stability and democracy—are served in pursuing that objective.



**Listen to the candidates' rhetoric.**  
**Are they exploiting our fears to gain our votes? Are they aware of the impact of words on foreign audiences?**

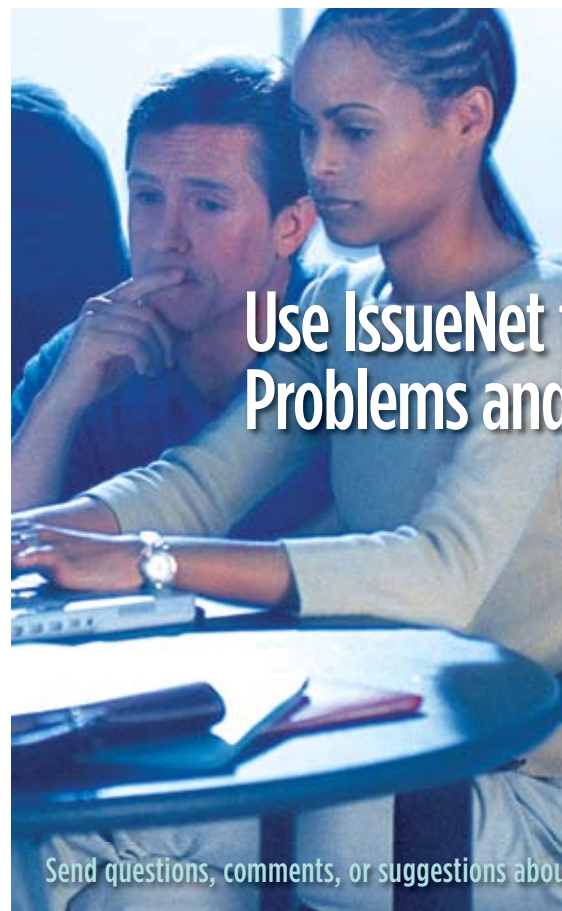
It is time to reassure our friends and our foes. There should be no doubt that the United States will act to protect itself no matter who is president, even acting preemptively in the face of imminent hostilities. Yet, presidents and candidates put us at risk when they outdo themselves to announce to the world that the United States has a hair trigger on its conventional and strategic weapons.



**The next president should take seriously the need to reform the United Nations. For too long we have ridiculed the UN, blamed it for our failures, and refused to compromise to make it stronger.**

A U.S. administration whose goal is to strengthen international law, prevent conflict, promote development, and build the peace in war-torn countries will need an effective United Nations. Internal UN reform that gives more authority to the Secretary General to manage resources; streamlines the budget process; makes the Security Council more inclusive; and strengthens peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace-building capacity will benefit the United States and contribute to global peace.

The United Nations is not a sovereign power whose purposes are alien to the United States, as some would have us believe. It is an indispensable meeting place for nations, the only vehicle we have for legitimizing international law, a potential instrument of



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collective security and peacekeeping, and a moral force for human rights and development cooperation.

The United States is the strongest power on the Security Council. It is time to use leadership and diplomacy to create an international organization capable of performing effectively in the twenty-first century.



***My fourth and final suggestion is that you listen carefully when the candidates discuss national security.***

They all will want to sound tough. They all will praise our military forces, as they should. The question is, “how will they use these forces?” Will they be smart as well as tough?

Starting a war in a country that is not a threat to the United States is not smart. Placing military forces in a situation where sectarian conflict is inevitable is not smart. Asking our military to use conventional means to fight terrorists who constitute an asymmetrical threat in hostile environments about which we know little is not smart.

U.S. military forces are the most effective in the world, but even they cannot win when there is no will for a political solution and no effective diplomacy to bring it about.

Conjuring a “war” that never was also has produced an irrational fear that has compromised our national values.

We have imprisoned people without due process, wire tapped U.S. citizens without appropriate court approval, and closed our borders to too many innocent students seeking an education.

One can argue that these measures have protected the homeland. I would suggest that U.S. citizens have great pride, not in a homeland per se, but in the values that make that homeland special. We have allowed the terrorists to intimidate us into becoming something we are not.

Abraham Lincoln said, “America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter, and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.” If we fail to reject the politics of fear, we risk losing all that we hold dear.

Can we strike a balance between security and fundamental values?

Combating terrorism successfully will require solid intelligence cooperation, good police work, scrutiny of banking arrangements to prevent the laundering of funds, and diplomatic negotiations to bring about enhanced cooperation. According to the last anti-terrorism chief at the State Department, at best, 20 percent of the solution involves our conventional military forces. Yet, we continue to starve our civilian assets—including intelligence, diplomacy, and development—while spending almost \$500 billion on our military. This is insane. It is counterproductive.

What can those of us in higher education do? How can we make a difference?

Effective internationalism is based on intercultural understanding. It does not mean remaking the world in our image. It means engagement, accommodation, and compromise. We have been trying it the other way for too long, and the failure of this unilateral approach is deeply painful to all of us.

It is time to become more active citizen leaders in the cause of enlightened internationalism. As educators and citizens of this world, you are well positioned to challenge presidential candidates—and anyone else who presumes to want to lead us—to seek solutions through international cooperation.

So, go forward and lead. Speak loudly with a single and enlightened voice for world peace and understanding. **IE**

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