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A Better Approach to Fragile States

The Long View

By John Norris June 2016

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Contents

- 1 Introduction and summary**
- 5 Winds of change**
- 9 Fragile not failed**
- 18 Toward a compact for inclusion, growth, and peace**
- 30 Conclusion**
- 31 Appendix**
- 33 About the author**
- 34 Endnotes**

Introduction and summary

Today, the world is groaning under the weight of unresolved crises, wars, terrorism, and the demands of dealing with more than 65 million people who have been forcibly displaced around the globe.

Paradoxically, as recently as five years ago, the international community was quietly celebrating historic progress in reducing serious conflict, the number of people forced to migrate, and deaths on the battlefield. Concerted efforts toward conflict prevention, resolution, and peace building were paying real dividends.

As Gareth Evans, president emeritus of the International Crisis Group, observed in a 2011 speech at the U.S. Institute of Peace:

Since the early 1990s, despite all the terrible cases we all remember, and all the terrible cases still ongoing in the Congo and elsewhere, there has been an extraordinary decrease in the number of wars, the number of episodes of mass killing, and the number of people dying violent battle deaths. In the case of serious conflicts (defined as those with 1000 or more reported battle deaths in a year) and mass killings there has been an 80 per cent decline since the early '90s. Though a number of significant new conflicts did commence, and a number of apparently successfully concluded conflicts did break out again within a few years—though less recently than in the 1990s—many more conflicts have stopped than started.

There has even more striking decrease in the number of battle deaths. Whereas most years from the 1940s through to the 1990s had over 100,000 such reported deaths—and sometimes as many as 500,000—the average for the first years of this new century has been fewer than 20,000.¹

Yet in 2015, 167,000 people died in armed conflicts² and refugee numbers spiked. Progress toward greater international stability and peace has not only stalled but significantly eroded over the past five years. Whether this is an anomaly in a broader positive trend or a genuine reversal of progress remains to be seen.

Obviously, conflict is not preordained to increase or decrease but is instead a manifestation of a complex series of political, diplomatic, economic, and personal dynamics. The current setbacks, however, create many drivers of further instability and the potential for rapidly spreading insecurity.

At a time when increasing attention is being paid to the gap between relief and development programs, this report examines the relatively recent spike in global conflict and the persistent shortcomings in moving larger numbers of countries out of what is described as “fragile state” status. This would prevent them from sliding into, or back into, conflict; becoming more costly, violent, and intractable situations; or providing safe havens for criminal groups or extremists. Fragile states are best viewed as countries with weak or illegitimate institutions and limited governing capacity that leave them uniquely vulnerable to shocks and the potential for conflict. Toward that end, this report recommends a deliberate strategy to shrink the overall number of fragile states by focusing on at-risk countries with the potential to move into a more enduring category of stability and prosperity.

In order to do this, the United States should draw on lessons from recent innovations in development and transform its approach to fragile states to center on mutually beneficial arrangements by developing Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts that provide substantial, consistent, and targeted assistance aimed at developing stronger and more legitimate institutions in partner countries. This model incorporates many elements of the model employed by the Millennium Challenge Corporation, or MCC—a bilateral U.S. aid agency established in 2004 that uses a competitive selection process and data-driven approach in determining where it distributes its grants, while offering the United States assurances that its assistance is being wisely used and in measurable ways to build peaceful and reliable allies. However, Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts, or IGPCs, represent a distinct and complementary approach to the MCC, particularly in recognizing the complex political and economic factors that often drive conflict. Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compact countries would receive more diplomatic attention from senior U.S. officials, as well as greater support in working through domestic and regional political obstacles to reducing fragility. Where necessary, the compacts would incorporate security assistance administered by the U.S. Department of State or the U.S. Department of Defense.

Under the program, selected fragile states where leaders are willing to abide by the agreed compact terms would be eligible for a five-year Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compact administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, under oversight of a board chaired by the U.S. secretary of state. The compact would deliver multiyear commitments toward mutually identified core priorities determined through a joint, inclusive analysis of the constraints to a state's peace and growth. IGPCs would generally focus on developing effective and legitimate institutions, including in the security sector, and shaping broad-based economic growth. Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts would focus on a core set of 10 indicators to determine initial and continuing eligibility for the program.

This approach to fragile states would counter the long-standing tendency of U.S. assistance programs to invest exorbitant amounts in failed states while scrimping on the long-term—and often far more modest—investments required to prevent the occurrence or recurrence of state failure or to shift countries out of fragility. This strategy would also more effectively allow the U.S. government to tailor its approach to the specific needs of its development partners—whether they are failed states, fragile states, MCC partner countries, or nations positioned to move beyond an assistance relationship to become more fulsome partners of the United States and the international community.

While largely envisioned as a civilian program, the report also spells out a number of needed steps to help ensure that U.S. security assistance in fragile states is coordinated into a broader political and economic strategy to build rather than undermine legitimacy and accountability.

There are models through which similar approaches by the United States and partners have worked in the past. When the United States has engaged in patient, long-term, and well-grounded strategic efforts to assist countries making difficult transitions, the results have often been impressive. Fifteen years of U.S. investment in both diplomacy and assistance have many viewing Colombia as a promising success story on the international stage. Similarly, considerable U.S. assistance to Liberia helped that country not only emerge from a ravaging civil war but also cope with the Ebola outbreak. Massive U.S. assistance to former Eastern bloc countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall played a key role in supporting their accession to the European Union and securing lasting political and economic reforms.

Coupled with existing international and regional support, Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts would offer a new and potentially transformative development tool for assisting fragile states as they try to achieve lasting stability and economic prosperity. For the United States and its partners, every success in this regard would represent potentially one less crisis on the international radar. And by any reckoning, the United States has a considerable vested interest in reducing the number of fragile states in order to moderate the spread of infectious diseases, crack down on criminal and extremist networks, prevent vast spending on humanitarian or security assistance, provide greater opportunities for trade, and shape more reliable allies and partners.

Winds of change

Not that long ago, many of the leading experts in the field of conflict analysis pointed out the broad positive trends toward peace. The view that serious conflict was on the decline was highlighted in the 2013 “Human Security Report,” based on statistics through 2011, which stated:

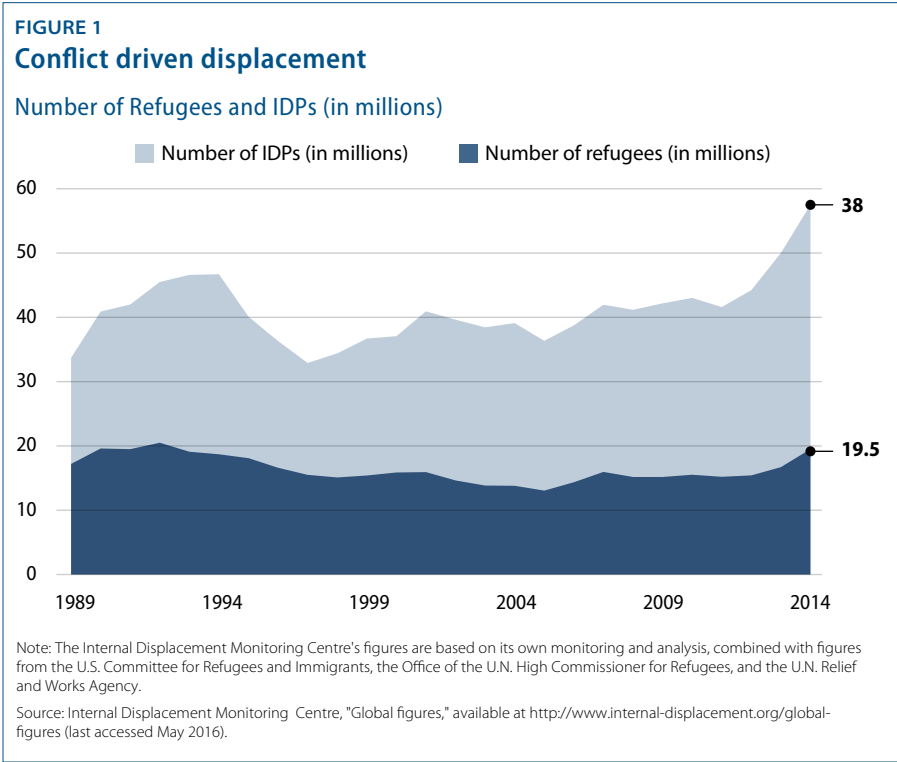
There are ample grounds for cautious optimism, but absolutely none for complacency. ... Data from recent centuries, and the fragmentary evidence we have from the distant past, strongly suggest that there has been an uneven but substantial decline in wars, homicides, and other forms of violence over numerous millennia. But this, of course, is no guarantee that the decline will continue into the future.³

In many ways, the Arab Spring movement that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread across the Middle East marked a pivotal point in the hopes for a more peaceful and prosperous world. Indeed, the Middle East as a region had long been largely resistant to the more open and legitimate forms of governance that had become commonplace across many other regions. Moreover, the Arab Spring had the potential to provide important forward momentum to that citizen-led drive for greater legitimacy, which it may still accomplish. Unfortunately, the Arab Spring also unleashed other pent-up forces, including extremism, long dormant claims for territory, and deep religious and social cleavages. Moreover, the Arab Spring movement was part of a broader pattern that triggered conflict in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere in the region.

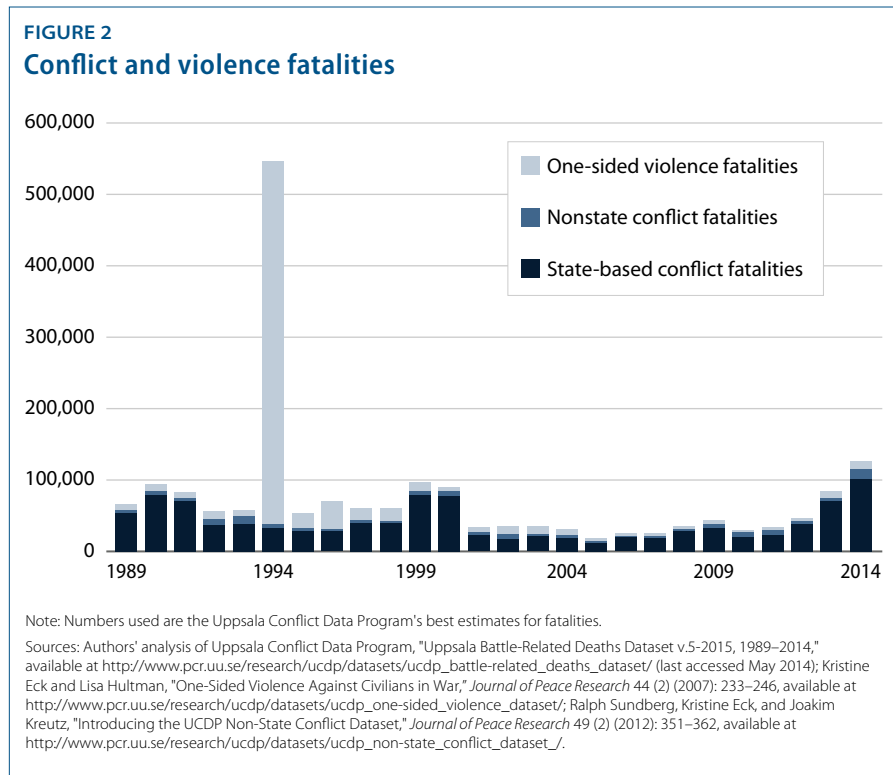
In 2011, there were 41.6 million refugees and internally displaced people, or IDPs—individuals forced to flee their homes but who have not crossed an international border.⁴ That total is now more than 65 million people and rising, a more than 50 percent spike in just five years.⁵ As has been widely noted, this is the highest level of global displacement since World War II.⁶ To put that in perspective, there are now more forcibly displaced people worldwide than reside in all of Italy. Displaced populations are now greater than the entire populations

of Pennsylvania, Illinois, Missouri, Maryland, Wisconsin, Colorado, Oregon, Kansas, Iowa, and Alabama combined. Beyond the war-torn nations from which people are fleeing, displacement is placing unprecedented strain on governments from Turkey and the Levant to Europe, feeding extremism and undermining stability. The situation is similar in large swathes of Africa and even in Southeast Asia, where forced migration and displacement have reached levels not seen since the 1970s. And this trend looks set to continue in 2016, which has already seen roughly 185,000 refugees and migrants cross the Mediterranean to Europe since the beginning of the year.⁷

This displacement of huge numbers of people is likely to remain a long-term problem. Moreover, the rate of refugee returns was at a 30-year low in 2014, with only 1 percent of total refugees returning to their homes, a figure that only slightly improved in 2015.⁸



Uppsala University in Sweden recently released its 2015 Conflict Data Program assessment, “Organized Violence in the World,” which notes, “The last five years have seen a dramatic increase in organized violence, especially in the Middle East, and if this trend continues an already very dire situation will rapidly become much worse. On the other hand the level of violence in 2014 is still much lower than the previous peak in 1994.”⁹ The report was, of course, referring to the Rwandan genocide of 1994, which saw some 750,000 people killed in a matter of months and dramatically increased global figures related to organized violence.



The report notes that data from Uppsala “show that well over 100,000 people were killed in organized violence” in 2014, “the highest fatality count in twenty years.”¹⁰ And the most recent Armed Conflict Survey published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies found that 167,000 people died in armed conflicts in 2015.¹¹ The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, or SIPRI, 2015 Yearbook argued that 2014 trends reinforced the notion “that the positive trend towards less violence and more effective conflict management witnessed over the past decade has been broken.” The report went on to note that preliminary findings suggest “that there were more wars in 2014 than any other year since 2000.”¹²

Other than the single-country spike during the Rwandan genocide, levels of violence are higher than they have been in generations.

It is estimated that nearly 1.4 billion people now live in fragile states, and that number will likely grow to 1.9 billion by 2030.¹³ Roughly two-thirds of fragile states failed to meet the target established by the Millennium Development Goals of halving extreme poverty by 2015, and most experts expect the majority of the world's extreme poor will soon be located in fragile states.¹⁴

Certainly, Syria is responsible for driving significant erosion in many of the conflict statistics. In 2015, Syria accounted for roughly one-third of all conflict fatalities as reported by the Armed Conflict Survey.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Syria Center for Policy Research recently found that 11.5 percent of Syria's population has been killed or injured as a result of the conflict since March 2011.¹⁶ However, the conflict in Syria is far from the only conflict propelling displacement and violence across the globe. Situations in Ukraine, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq all play a role in contributing to a growing public perception that the international community is just not very effective at peace building. As Philip Gordon, the Obama administration's former Middle East adviser, observed, "We intervened in Iraq and sent troops and that didn't work out too well. We intervened in Libya and didn't send troops and that didn't work. In Syria, we stayed out and that hasn't worked either."¹⁷

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. government and citizens more broadly accepted the idea that insecurity, instability, and lawlessness in other nations—even those as far away as Afghanistan—can directly affect American national security. The easy flow of fighters to and from Syria and cross-border violence driven by the drug trade between Mexico and the United States reinforce this idea. The territory used by groups that threaten the United States generally lies within states that suffer from significant economic, political, and security challenges. They are, in the parlance of international development and foreign assistance, fragile before they are failed.

For the most part, even when fragile states pose a threat to U.S. security, these countries tend not to garner headlines or global attention. As the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke once noted while pressing for troops to be sent to the Balkans, "We always talk about 'preventative diplomacy.' ... Everyone talks about it, but no one ever does anything about it."¹⁸ In the recent trend toward instability, what stands out most is that a number of fragile states collapsed and went from being minor to major global security challenges. Clearly, there is a need for a new approach to fragile states.

Fragile not failed

In most discussions of fragile states, the conversation quickly drifts toward the most extreme cases: countries that are not only fragile but those that have genuinely failed at some point, such as a Somalia, Syria, or Afghanistan. But the pool of fragile states is much larger and more diverse, and as a cohort, it includes countries trying to emerge from recent—or in some cases, not so recent—conflicts; countries making the transition from one form of governance to another; countries with generally weak or illegitimate institutions; countries where basic economic conditions remain deeply perilous; countries caught in broader regional tides of instability; and countries with unresolved ethnic, religious, or class cleavages.

And because conflict is cyclical, it is known with reasonably high probability that future conflicts, and potentially even future failed states, will spring from this pool of fragile states. Indeed, the World Bank's 2011 "World Development Report" observed that, "90 percent of the last decade's civil wars occurred in countries that had already had a civil war in the last 30 years."¹⁹

Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition of state fragility, there is broadly overlapping agreement on the key elements of fragility, and a number of institutions track state fragility on a regular basis. This includes the World Bank's Harmonized List of Fragile Situations,²⁰ The Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index,²¹ and the Polity Project's rankings on a range of indicators,²² many of which speak to key elements of fragility. In addition, a number of U.S. government offices are charged with tracking fragility and potential instability, including the USAID Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, the U.S. State Department Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, and the Atrocity Prevention Board chaired out of the National Security Council. The Central Intelligence Agency, or CIA, and the intelligence services of other nations devote substantial resources to evaluating and estimating the threat posed by state fragility.

The dozens of indices and annual reports that evaluate global instability or state fragility all include various evaluations that speak to the issue of state legitimacy, including indicators on institutional effectiveness, the rule of law, political

accountability, the security environment, and competency in meeting people's fundamental needs. Legitimacy does not require democracy, but on balance, the most legitimate states are more democratic because they incorporate a significant degree of political accountability that is difficult to produce in nondemocracies. Among fragile and collapsed states, levels of legitimacy tend to be low with less-effective state institutions, an uneven and infective justice sector and rule of law, high levels of corruption, and a general lack of accountability.

The pool of fragile states is substantial. For example, the World Bank lists 36 countries on its fragile states list for 2016.²³ The Fund for Peace, with considerable overlap with the World Bank's list, includes 38 countries in its 2015 top three tiers of fragility—very high alert, high alert, and alert.²⁴ Many of the countries on these lists have drifted in and out of bouts of more serious instability over extended periods of time. And in many cases, they become drivers of instability in their regions and beyond. In the worst cases, such as the situations in Iraq and Syria, fragile states become failed ones. It is also important to note that fragility is not limited to low-income countries; indeed, 15 of the 56 countries on the World Bank's list of lower-middle income countries also show up on the fragile states list maintained by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD.²⁵

The overall strategic aim for the international community would appear to be fairly straightforward: shrink the overall number of fragile states and sustainably move larger numbers of countries into the category of relative peace and increasing prosperity. Such a strategy to diminish the pool of fragile states argues for a renewed focus on the countries best positioned to make a lasting leap out of the fragile category. By working closely with countries on the cusp of more enduring stability, the United States and like-minded partners in the international community can begin to drive the overall number of fragile states down and focus increasing diplomatic, economic assistance, and other resources on the states involved in the messiest and most protracted conflicts. It follows that the countries that are most likely to make an enduring move out of fragility are also willing to make hard choices: to genuinely share power; to include traditionally marginalized groups in the life of the nation; to combat corruption; and to make smart investments in broad-based economic growth and essential social services.

A strategy designed to shrink the number of fragile states in a deliberate fashion is obviously logical and would reduce the risk and expense of future protracted conflict or new terrorist or criminal safe havens. Yet the United States' current approach to fragile states follows a very different dynamic in which the countries best positioned to emerge from instability are often given the least time and attention.

An easily distracted donor

The United States, along with most of the international community, follows a somewhat predictable pattern. Donor money and high-level diplomatic attention flood into fragile states fairly quickly following a cessation of hostilities or a peace deal, the holding of a democratic election after a transition, or the death of a long-ruling despot. Indeed, so much money often comes in from donors that the local economy experiences significant distortions, as local salaries are rapidly inflated and governments with limited capacity struggle to deal with new programs. Competing demands from donors and the inevitable strains of a messy political transition can make matters worse.²⁶ Donor assistance can be wildly variable during this initial gold rush period and often makes up a high proportion of host country budgets.²⁷

However, after three to five years, there are invariably other high-profile transition countries for donors to rush into and aid levels can quickly, and sometimes precipitously, drop. Momentum often fades as diplomatic and donor attention turns elsewhere, and spoilers—those eager to push a country back toward violence for their own ends—may have more room to operate. Making the transition fully out of fragility is a long process, typically requiring at least 10 years of relative stability for genuine power-sharing to occur and for a country to begin attracting broader levels of foreign direct investment and trade, which are crucial to prolonged stability and growth.

Indeed, academics Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Mans Soderbom found that if a post-conflict country's economy “remains stagnant through the [first post-conflict] decade, the decade-risk [of falling back into conflict] is 42.2%. If, instead, the economy grows at 10% per year, which is fast but not without precedent, the decade-risk falls to 26.9%.”²⁸

But the international community is often sharply scaling back assistance as countries try to cross the threshold into stability. At a time when fragile states are potentially poised to begin moving into a more mature relationship with donors—for example, by becoming eligible to begin dialogue on a MCC compact—international concern, funding, and diplomatic pressure is at a low ebb. Given such a dynamic, it is not surprising that large numbers of fragile states often slide backward toward conflict and greater, not less, instability. Even some states that are currently engaged in MCC compacts remain troubled by institutional weaknesses that have left them on fragile states watch lists.

The other important dynamic to understand with regard to assistance for fragile states is the willingness of the U.S. government to dedicate almost unlimited resources to states it views as high strategic priorities, combined with an institutional reluctance to invest in conflict prevention. These proclivities are all the more striking given that countries viewed as high strategic priorities receive enormous resource flows despite demonstrating little evidence of reform or legitimacy, while countries viewed as relatively low strategic priorities with far more legitimate governments and institutions making significant progress toward enduring stability receive relatively modest levels of assistance.

In short, the U.S. government often rewards failure and underperformance to a remarkable degree. To put that in practical perspective, from 2011 to 2015, U.S. government spending on economic assistance in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan totaled about \$11.9 billion. In comparison, 30 other countries on the fragile states list received around \$13.71 billion combined in the same time frame.²⁹ This spending in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan comes on top of the trillions of dollars that have gone into military interventions in these nations, further underscoring the prohibitive cost of getting it wrong on fragile states. This is not to argue that the United States should not invest in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan. However, it does make clear that the United States has a tendency to invest most heavily where the conditions for success are the least promising. And while greater assistance levels are not a silver bullet, increased aid and more effective diplomatic interventions based on a sound analysis of the political economy can make a real difference in promising fragile states.

A more targeted approach

Countries in the softer tier of fragility offer the greatest promise of lasting returns for sustained investment by the United States and the international community. Toward that end, the 2015 Fund for Peace fragile states list is useful for illustrative purposes. Notably, the most accurate and useful model of fragility comes from comparing and blending multiple lists of fragile states, which helps to correct for some of the peculiarities within the specific methodologies employed by the different models.

TABLE 1
2015 Fund for Peace Fragile States Index

Very high alert	1 South Sudan
	2 Somalia
	3 Central African Republic
	4 Sudan
High alert	5 Congo (D.R.)
	6 Chad
	7 Yemen
	8 Syria
	9 Afghanistan
	10 Guinea
	11 Haiti
	12 Iraq
	13 Pakistan
	14 Nigeria
	15 Côte d'Ivoire
	16 Zimbabwe
Alert	17 Guinea-Bissau
	18 Burundi
	19 Niger
	20 Ethiopia
	21 Kenya
	22 Liberia
	23 Uganda
	24 Eritrea
	25 Libya
	26 Mauritania
	27 Myanmar
	28 Cameroon
	29 North Korea
	30 Mali
	31 Sierra Leone
	32 Bangladesh
	33 Congo (D.R.)
	34 Sri Lanka

Alert	35	Timor-Leste
	36	Nepal
	37	Rwanda
	38	Egypt
High warning	39	Burkina Faso
	40	Djibouti
	41	Lebanon
	42	Angola
	43	Cambodia
	44	Iran
	45	Mozambique
	46	Malawi
	47	Togo
	48	Philippines
	49	Swaziland
	50	Solomon Islands
	51	Gambia
	51	Uzbekistan
	53	Zambia
	54	Equatorial Guinea
	55	Laos
	56	Madagascar
	57	Tajikistan
	58	Papua New Guinea
59	Comoros	
60	Senegal	
61	Colombia	
62	Kyrgyz Republic	
63	Tanzania	
64	Guatemala	
65	Russia	
Warning	66	Lesotho
	67	Algeria
	68	India
	69	Israel/West Bank
	70	Georgia

Warning

71	Thailand
72	Nicaragua
73	Benin
74	Bhutan
75	Venezuela
76	Honduras
77	Bolivia
78	Turkmenistan
79	Bosnia
80	Azerbaijan
81	Jordan
82	Fiji
83	China
84	Ukraine
85	Ecuador
86	Tunisia
87	Belarus
88	Indonesia
89	Morocco
90	Turkey
91	Maldives
92	Serbia
93	São Tomé & Príncipe
94	Micronesia
95	Cape Verde
96	Moldova
97	Vietnam
98	Peru
99	Ghana
100	Mexico
101	Saudi Arabia
102	El Salvador
103	Paraguay
104	Gabon
105	Dominican Republic
106	Namibia
107	Guyana

Source: Fund for Peace, "Fragile States Index 2015," available at <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2015> (last accessed May 2016).

The countries in the very high alert category and upper echelons of high alert are undergoing long-term and very difficult peace efforts. Indeed, a number of them—such as South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan—remain in the throes of hot conflicts. For a strategy to shrink the number of fragile states, these countries represent the most difficult challenges with the lowest probability of success. All of them require political and military settlements, supported by an international diplomatic, and sometimes military, strategy. Assistance, and particularly assistance designed to help build the legitimacy and effectiveness of institutions, can play an important role in bolstering such political settlements, but such aid programs are by no means a substitute for an effective political and diplomatic strategy. This dynamic has been made painfully clear over the past 15 years in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where security and nonsecurity assistance were poured into conflicts without any peace process or comprehensive political and military strategy.

Countries in the alert and higher warning categories are generally much more promising and most demonstrate a complex mixture of encouraging and discouraging indicators that explain their relative rankings on the list. Countries such as Niger, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Lebanon, Uganda, Myanmar, Cameroon, Egypt, Mali, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Nepal, and Rwanda all stand out as countries where a mixture of host country commitment, effective diplomacy, positive leverage, and sound assistance strategies could help move them more permanently out of the fragility category. Nations with even better rankings that are under particular threat or of particular national security interest to the United States and its allies, such as Mali and Tunisia, also provide opportunities. It should be noted that this list is illustrative and not defined as the exact cohort of countries to be targeted. Some of these countries, such as Liberia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, are currently in partnerships with the MCC but still remain distinctly fragile and could use assistance directly tailored to address the roots of that fragility.

Some will naturally question whether these or a similar set of countries represent pressing strategic priorities. But the question itself misses the threat posed by fragile states. As noted earlier, few in the U.S. legislative or executive branches viewed Afghanistan or Somalia as countries of pressing strategic concern until their eventual lurch into failed state status unleashed a Pandora's box of problems that have stretched across decades, ranging from terrorism and piracy to the international drug trade and refugees. Because Afghanistan and Somalia became failed states, they have consumed hundreds of billions of dollars in international assistance and necessitated repeated military interventions costing far more.

Not every fragile state is at risk of becoming the next Afghanistan or Somalia, and most will not. However, it is overridingly in the U.S. national interest to reduce the number of fragile states, even when that means committing resources and diplomatic bandwidth to situations that have slipped off the front page of the newspaper. And in many ways that is the point: effectively assist states in becoming more legitimate and effective so they can stay off the front page of the newspaper.

What these states generally have in common is that they are the forgotten center, the nations that will either tip the world further into disorder or serve as sources of growing stability. They are neither in enough of a crisis to merit extraordinary intervention nor stable and legitimate enough to assume that they are firmly on a lasting path of stability. These countries are the best places for the United States to take an integrated approach to long-term support.

Toward a compact for inclusion, growth, and peace

How should policymakers prioritize among the numerous countries that appear in the soft upper tiers of fragility or are of particular concern? Some countries within this relative band are there because they are showing improvement from earlier crises, others are moving in the wrong direction, and still others simply remain mired in a long-simmering and unsatisfactory status quo. Moreover, countries currently in acute conflict will hopefully move into this band as they achieve some level of stability.

A recent piece by former Deputy U.S. Secretary of State William J. Burns and former Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher about the situation in Tunisia captures what should be the driving force in prioritizing this new approach to fragile states: genuine partnership and mutual accountability. Burns and Muasher argue that Tunisia is one of these critical states with which the U.S. government could engage more strategically to bring it out of fragility—“Precisely because Tunisia can still succeed, we can’t afford to fail.”³⁰ The authors suggest the idea of establishing “a new framework for partnership—a compact that couples Tunisian-led policy and bureaucratic reforms with more coordinated and concrete international assistance.”

Burns and Muasher capture a growing sentiment for a new approach to fragile states. In short, the United States should far more actively engage diplomatically and provide more direct assistance to the fragile states within this cohort that are willing to commit to clear progress toward agreed-upon benchmarks and standards.

The best way to achieve this would be by leveraging a model built upon the experience of MCC compacts—Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts—for countries facing far greater instability. These compacts would be mutually beneficial arrangements to ensure partner nations more substantial, predictable, and appropriate assistance that would help position them for eligibility for funding from the MCC. Host countries would also receive more senior-level diplomatic attention and assistance in working through key domestic and regional political

obstacles standing in the way of lasting political reconciliation. For its part, the United States, through use of agreed-upon standards and benchmarks, would receive far greater assurances that its assistance was being widely utilized with a far greater likelihood that it would produce lasting partners and allies that enjoy peace and the fruits of economic growth.

There are a number of recent examples of types of compacts that are a useful jumping off point. The Millennium Challenge Corporation offers five-year funding, or a compact, to countries that are eligible to receive assistance based on a fairly comprehensive set of policy indicators. Countries remain eligible for this assistance as long as they abide by the terms of the compact. For example, Tanzania's compact was suspended in 2016 after an election was re-contested without constitutional grounds for doing so.³¹

And while assistance priorities are set by the host country and through a negotiation between the recipient and the United States, eligibility for MCC compacts is determined by a heavy emphasis on good governance, economic freedom, and a country's willingness to invest in its own citizens—key areas that can help build legitimacy. Rather than directing money to the recipient nation, often through parallel structures that can actually undermine state legitimacy, and before any money is disbursed, the United States and the partner country sign an agreement that outlines the commitments that both will make to one another. For example, the United States provides financial support and the partner country agrees to use that funding only in specific, mutually acceptable ways and agrees to maintain a level of accountability and transparency required by the MCC compacts. The MCC also offers threshold programs, which consist of smaller grants, to assist countries that are near eligibility for an MCC program but need to make policy improvements in specific areas.

The MCC approach has been applauded for its reliance on evidence, its use of transparent data, and holding countries accountable while making a multiyear commitment of funds. Some countries have been eligible for a second five-year funding compact as well.

However, it is also important to recognize the limits of the MCC approach as it relates to fragile states. In many ways, the MCC has the easiest lift of the different aid agencies in that it works exclusively in countries that have already demonstrated a commitment to effective governance and a relatively solid track record of social and economic success. The MCC is largely administered from Washington,

D.C., with limited field staff, and most of the countries within the ranks of MCC programming are not riven by ongoing socio-political disputes and violence. In the MCC countries where real fragility remains, the MCC programs are not designed to specifically address the thorny political, social, and institutional issues usually at the heart of potential instability.

Another interesting compact model comes through the g7+. The g7+, an intergovernmental organization established in 2010 by a group of countries that recently experienced conflict, is a voluntary association of conflict and post-conflict states working to stop conflict and eradicate poverty through country-owned and -led strategies.³² The association serves as a platform for member countries to advocate for effective development policies and to participate in peer-to-peer learning.

The founding members of the g7+, such as Liberia, have placed considerable emphasis on establishing the legitimacy of the state through good governance, the provision of social services, anti-corruption efforts, and power-sharing. As the g7+ has expanded its ranks, these core commitments have been met unevenly, but they point to an important recognition that good governance and measurable progress are core elements of any successful effort to emerge from conflict in a lasting fashion.

How an Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compact would work

Countries selected would be eligible to enter into a five-year compact with the United States delivering multiyear commitments to core priorities jointly identified by the host country, its citizens, and USAID, which would administer the compacts under the oversight of a board chaired by the U.S. secretary of state, similar to the system used for the MCC. The board should be independent and bipartisan and, in addition to being chaired by the secretary of state, would include the U.S. secretary of treasury and the USAID administrator. Where the U.S. military is engaged in assistance, the board would include the U.S. secretary of defense and the relevant regional military commander and/or representative of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The diversity of the MCC's board, in that it is not just drawn from those inside the executive branch, is a strength and should be emulated here as well.

Special emphasis would be placed on an inclusive process for identifying host country priorities, and the process itself would be a mechanism for encouraging greater social cohesion and reconciliation. Only countries willing to abide by

the terms of the compact would be eligible. This approach recognizes the special nature of fragile states, where progress is rarely uniform or entirely linear. An approach that is as mechanical as that of the MCC simply would not work, and the Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts would not be as binary as the MCC. Helping shape legitimate, sustainable institutions and broad-based economic growth—both vital in reducing the potential for conflict—would be core to the mission of the Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts.

USAID’s and the State Department’s field presence in compact countries is essential for a number of reasons. Addressing the forces that drive fragility in a developing country invariably involves complex questions of political economy. Addressing these forces through an effective assistance program requires persistent and strategic engagement on the ground. Such a field presence is also vital in making course corrections to the compact as needed and maintaining positive diplomatic pressure for reform.

The MCC measures a set of three categories—ruling justly, investing in people, and economic freedom—backed by 20 different sets of indicators. A country is considered eligible for a compact if its score on 20 indicators exceeds the median score of its peer group. Although the MCC includes significant data on ruling justly and investing in people, its core imperative is to seek poverty reduction through economic growth. The MCC and the host country undertake a joint analysis on “constraints to growth” as part of the effort to design a coherent and effective plan for compact spending. Countries are required to pass at least half of the total number of indicators—10 of the 20, for example. Of these indicators, two are considered “hard hurdles” that are required for eligibility—control of corruption and either safeguarding civil liberties or political rights.³³

Just as MCC compacts require an upfront commitment from the partner government—agreeing to the terms of assistance and the specific uses of any funds—so too would IGPCs require upfront agreement to the terms of the partnership. Those terms would specify the use of funds, projects to be undertaken, and the necessary support from the partner government, to name a few required areas of agreement.

IGPCs would focus on a core set of 10 indicators. These indicators, listed in the text box, go to some of the key challenges facing fragile states as they try to emerge into lasting stability and prosperity. These indicators would be used both to help determine eligibility for a potential compact and to measure progress once in a compact.

IGPC indicators

1. The number of refugees and IDPs as measured by U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, Statistical Yearbooks³⁴
2. Group grievance as measured by The Fund for Peace³⁵
3. Government effectiveness as measured by the World Bank³⁶
4. Natural resource management as measured by Center for International Earth Science Information Network, or CIESIN³⁷
5. Land rights and access as measured by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, or IFAD,³⁸ and the International Finance Corporation, or IFC³⁹
6. Quality of public services as measured by The Fund for Peace⁴⁰
7. Political rights as measured by Freedom House⁴¹
8. Civil liberties as measured by Freedom House⁴²
9. Fiscal policy as measured by national sources, as well as the International Monetary Fund, or IMF, World Economic Outlook, or WEO⁴³
10. Corruption as measured by the World Bank⁴⁴

The IGPCs, while utilizing fewer indicators than the MCC, would have a broader lens than just driving economic growth. USAID, the U.S. State Department, and the host country, with other assistance as needed, would conduct a joint analysis on constraints to peace and growth to assist in designing the compact. The framework for such an analysis would have to be developed as part of this initiative. The Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts should identify priority areas that go beyond the competencies of the State Department or USAID and could require support and assistance from fellow agencies, such as the U.S. departments of Justice or the Treasury.

Because the compacts would focus on institution building as much as economic growth, special emphasis would be placed on support for accountable domestic resource mobilization, with a special assistance packages to support fragile states in improving the transparency, accountability, and governance of resources for development, including domestic resources. For countries trying to emerge from conflict, ensuring transparent and accountable management of public resources is essential to ensure that these assets and revenues are channeled toward inclusive economic growth and development.

The U.N. Financing for Development conference held in Ethiopia in 2015 strongly supported such calls for greater domestic resource mobilization, and it naturally dovetails with an effective fragile states strategy. Such an approach to resource mobilization is most useful when it is explicitly paired with efforts to improve the provision of public services so that citizens see an increase in their quality of life in exchange for participating in a more predictable and regular system of taxation. As Gargee Gosh of the Gates Foundation argues:

Stronger tax systems also have benefits beyond the revenue they generate. Well-designed tax systems can strengthen the relationship between citizens and government—giving citizens a stronger stake in what their government does and a stronger incentive to demand accountability.

For governments, taxes are a critical lever for delivering on the promise of social and economic equity. And efforts like the World Bank’s service delivery indicators project, which measures the quality of health and education services in Africa, provide citizens a clear and tangible means of connecting the taxes they pay to the service they receive.⁴⁵

These programs can be highly effective when U.S. government assistance is matched by the commitment and buy-in of host country resources and political will, as USAID experience in places such as El Salvador and Georgia has demonstrated. Absent those factors, these programs have historically had limited impact.

Similar to the MCC indicators, the IGPC indicators would be refined over time, reflecting feedback and learning from the experience of implementation in the field. Unlike the MCC compacts, the Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts would not focus on progress relative to a country’s peers in the same income category. For example, an MCC country could fall below a threshold on an indicator even if it made progress simply because its peers made faster relative progress during the same time period. IGPCs would instead focus on absolute progress, with a requirement that half of the indicators show progress for a reporting period.

The most conflict-affected or autocratic regimes would obviously be excluded from consideration for an IGPC, with some kind of floor established in indicator areas.

Given the inherent difficulties of emerging from conflict and fragility, the United States should use all of its policy tools to support partner countries making this difficult transition. This could, perhaps, include favorable trade terms for a set duration capacity, along the lines of what is done for the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which offers trade incentives such as duty-free and quota-free access for African countries willing to continue their efforts to open their economies and build free markets.⁴⁶

A wide range of activities, administered by an array of U.S. government agencies, would be appropriate for inclusion in a compact. Illustratively, this could include efforts to:

- Reduce trade barriers and improve relations with neighboring states
- Reform the security sector and professionalize a military to bring it under more effective democratic rule
- Provide power more widely to the general population
- Strengthen democratic institutions and participation
- Revitalize agriculture or other income generating activities
- Strengthen property rights and legal identity
- Combat infectious diseases
- Rebuild roads to improve market access

The role of security assistance

While the IGPCs are primarily designed as a civilian tool, where security is a significant factor, they would ensure that U.S. military assistance in fragile states encourages legitimacy and an integrated effort to reduce fragility. Indeed, too often, particularly in less high-profile countries, economic and military assistance programs appear to have little relationship to one another, and the host military is often treated as if it is operating in a vacuum rather than as an integral part of an accountable government.

An important first step in ensuring that security assistance supports lasting transitions for fragile states would be to reform the way the U.S. Department of Defense manages and directs its security assistance for developing countries. Authorities and funding for the Pentagon's security assistance are spread across too many units and accounts, which has made effective coordination and sound strategic planning—much less coordination with fellow agencies such as the U.S. State Department and USAID—daunting. The most useful and often low-profile Department of Defense programs—for instance the Defense Institution Reform Initiative, or DIRI—would be far more effective as part of an Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compact.

The Senate is currently considering a proposal that would consolidate security cooperation authorities into a single chapter of U.S. code, with funding directed out of a newly created Security Cooperation Enhancement Fund. Supporters argue that this would allow the Defense Department's senior civilian and military leaders to make strategic choices with respect to the allocation of security cooperation resources against strategic priorities, rather than being forced to patch together disparate funding sources to achieve objectives.

Importantly for the case of fragile states, these proposed reforms also mandate the creation of a professional workforce within the Defense Department to oversee such security assistance. A dedicated cadre of professionals trained in best practices would be far better positioned to place U.S. security assistance within a larger politico-economic context in fragile states and harness this assistance as a net positive able to provide momentum for lasting social change. Proponents rightly argue that using security assistance to build the security capabilities of a host country requires a specialized set of skills and that the existing system has done a poor job of training and maintaining Pentagon staff with the requisite expertise in this area.

Most importantly, U.S. development assistance, security cooperation, and diplomacy need to be viewed as part of a holistic whole if the goal is to help countries make a lasting move away from fragility and toward lasting stability and prosperity. Delivering military assistance to corrupt or illegitimate regimes in the hopes of preserving influence or good military relations is a fool's errand.

It is also recommended that any country that is taking part in an IGPC and subsequently has its compact suspended for nonperformance or behavior antithetical to U.S. interests would also automatically have its U.S. military assistance suspended, unless the president provides a determination for a continuation of such assistance to the Congress with a justification for doing so.

And similar to the MCC, IGPCs would be subject to suspension for underperformance or nonperformance. The causes for potential suspensions would not be that different from those established by the MCC, which can suspend or terminate compacts if the recipient country is engaged in behavior contrary to the national security interests of the United States, the recipient's actions are inconsistent with the criteria used to determine eligibility, or if the country has otherwise failed to discharge its responsibilities under the compact. The decision to suspend would ideally be made by the bipartisan governing board overseeing the IGPCs .

Resourcing the compacts

The Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts would need to be established through legislation and would require significant dedicated multiyear funding to be effective. The fact that these compacts could be created in a largely budget neutral fashion and would place a heavy emphasis on demonstrable results should resonate with members of Congress regardless of party orientation.

The most obvious way to resource IGPCs would be to link them to existing pools of assistance, as well as to the Overseas Contingency Operations, or OCO, account. The OCO account was developed out of the supplemental funding for the so-called Global War on Terror after the September 11 attacks and was initially designed to support the extraordinary costs of engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, then later in Iraq.⁴⁷ The account has continued to evolve since that time, and it remains an important source of funding for USAID and the departments of Defense and State. This report examines only the portions of OCO that relate to “foreign operations”—that is, USAID and State Department operations.

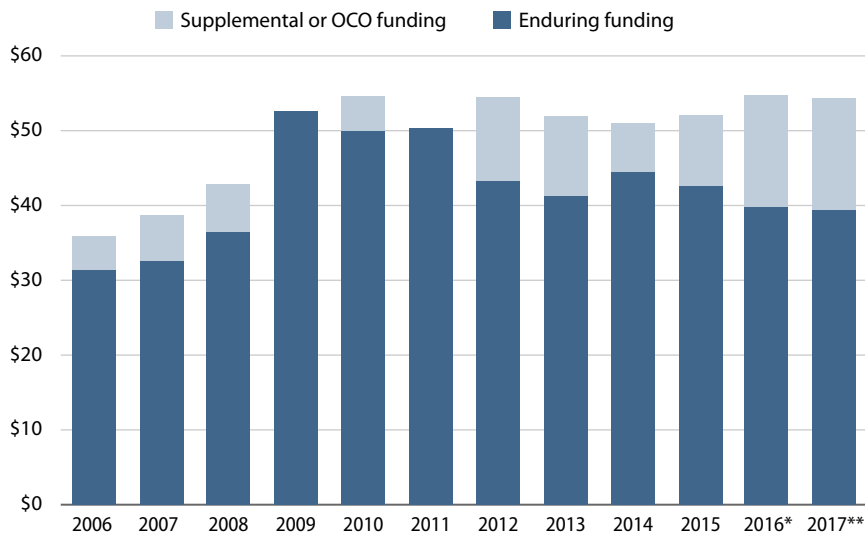
In many ways, OCO has served as a parallel budget for the State Department, USAID, and the U.S. military over the past decade, which is cause for some concern. In many instances, OCO has been used to fund activities that are not part of any contingency but rather as a way for Congress and the administration to get around the sequester under the Budget Control Act of 2011, which exempt OCO from caps that trigger mandatory sequestration cuts.⁴⁸ As the Center for American Progress has written elsewhere, such misuse of OCO must be stopped and the majority of OCO funding returned to the base budget. But in cases of actual contingencies, OCO has been a significant and vital source of funding for both the State Department and USAID. In many ways, it has served as a way to preserve the overall funding levels for the State Department and USAID at times when its baseline budgets were under considerable pressure. Using OCO for an IGPC would be more appropriate than many of its other functions beyond those for which it was originally designed.

As the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition noted:

In a time of shrinking budgets, the key “relief valve” that has ensured international program funding can meet growing challenges has been an emergency wartime account known as Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO). This account has been absolutely essential to meet growing needs, but is now funding things well beyond emergency program.

The reliance on it has steadily grown from 9 to 28 percent since 2010 while base funding has been cut by 30 percent. This is a dangerous trend in the long run with more than one of every four international dollars covered by this temporary account.⁴⁹

FIGURE 3
U.S. foreign operations funding trends, request for fiscal years 2006–2017 (in millions)



* Estimated

** Requested

Source: Adapted from authors' analysis of U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Assistance Budget Releases," available at <http://www.state.gov/f/releases/iab/> (last accessed May 2016).

While a significant portion of the \$5.2 billion fiscal year 2016 request for foreign operation spending through OCO was dedicated to Afghanistan (\$1.21 billion), Iraq (\$311 million), and Pakistan (\$600 million), humanitarian accounts also make up a large portion of the OCO request, including \$810 million within the International Disaster Assistance request and \$819 million within the Migration and Refugee Assistance request.⁵⁰ The OCO request also included economic support for peacekeeping, aid to Jordan, funds for the Syrian opposition, the State Department Counterterrorism Partnership Fund, aid to Ukraine, and international narcotics programs.⁵¹

Phasing out OCO altogether would only make sense if the baseline budget for foreign operations is increased accordingly. Bringing these funds back into the baseline budget for foreign operations makes a great deal of sense and would present the ideal opportunity to establish dedicated multiyear funding for Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts. As noted, IGPCs have the potential to be effectively budget neutral because overall spending in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq should be coming down, and all of the countries potentially available for the compacts already receive some levels of assistance.

While Congress has often been reluctant to provide multiyear funding for assistance, Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts—similar to MCC compacts—would only release spending for demonstrated results that are approved by a bipartisan board, offering a very reasonable assurance of their relative effectiveness. They would also serve as a catalyst of support from other foreign partners and multinational organizations.

International collaboration

The strategy for fragile states spelled out in this report—and supported by the establishment of Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts as an essential development tool—is designed initially as a bilateral mechanism. That said, it obviously lends itself over time to effective international collaboration and burden sharing, and it is hoped that the compacts could serve as a cornerstone for the establishment of an effective multilateral approach along the same lines.

The more regional and international support that a fragile country has—in terms of assistance, integration into regional institutions, and support for effective peace building—the more effective it will likely be in finding partners to help it tackle problems. This support can reinforce and complement U.S. support. And as has been seen with the MCC and its use of performance-based measurement and willingness to reward results, the United States can be a genuine leader in setting the tone for overall development and peace-building efforts internationally. It is all the more true in this case because the United States has long been the largest donor of humanitarian assistance around the globe, giving it a particular market advantage in setting the tone for approaching fragile states.

U.S. leadership in this space would also be particularly influential with regard to the activities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. And in light of the growing international crisis around refugees and internally displaced people, the international financial institutions have recognized that special approaches may be required to effectively address the situation, as noted in the recently released report of the U.N. High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing.⁵²

It is also worth noting the power of regional and subregional organizations in setting norms that encourage democracy, open trade, and the political resolution of conflicts. Regional alliances among the most stable, legitimate governments in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia create peer groups that can support each other and

lift up something to which more fragile neighbors can aspire; this remains one of the best bulwarks against continued fragility and renewed conflict.

For example, the Organization of American States, or OAS, has been a very useful voice in promoting respect for the rule of law, conflict resolution, and democracy throughout the Americas. In Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has made significant progress in creating a loose economic bloc that promotes regional growth—the type of project that the United States supports.

While the United States has limited ability to influence the foreign assistance policies of other nations, it should encourage other donor countries to adopt similar approaches with the same set of fragile countries and likewise encourage regional institutions to do what they can as well.

Conclusion

With a new president soon to take office in the United States and a new U.N. secretary-general to be agreed upon in New York, the time is now ripe to advance the necessary institutional changes needed for a new approach to the enduring problem of fragile states. The model suggested in this report is especially useful in that it establishes a far more logical order and set of tools for addressing the problem of fragility within developing countries and recognizes the abiding importance of state legitimacy and institutions in driving effective development decisions.

The establishment of Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts would allow the United States to view its partner countries within a sensible set of needs and use tools designed to effectively move partners into a more mature and lasting relationship.

Countries emerging from conflict would be evaluated to join the ranks of Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compact states, and the fragile states going through the Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts would be measured against clear and mutually agreed-upon standards as a means to maintain momentum toward peace and broad-based economic growth.

The rest of the donor world—and the United States in particular—has seen the folly of failing to invest in fragile states with unprecedented costs in lives and expense. USAID has built strategies for fragile states since 2004, but those strategies remained the purview of the development community, not strategies for applying all elements of U.S. power to critical challenges.⁵³ Fragile states should not be relegated to the margins of U.S. policy but instead demand an integrated, strategic, and data-driven response. Inclusion, Growth, and Peace Compacts are a tool to bring support for fragile states through development, security, and other assistance to more effectively help states emerge from fragility and reduce the threats to international peace and stability that arise when fragile states fail.

All of this recognizes that development is a long-term effort. But with better use of data and analytics and a clear establishment of mutual responsibilities for donors and recipients alike, transformative change is possible—even in very challenging environments.

Appendix

TABLE 2
Harmonized list of fragile situations FY 2016*

Country	The World Bank Group's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment	The African Development Bank's or the Asian Development Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment	Harmonized average	Political and peacebuilding missions**	Peacekeeping missions***
Eligible for the International Development Association					
Afghanistan	2.650	2.800	2.7	✓	
Burundi	3.267	3.376	3.3	✓	
Central African Republic	2.433	2.283	2.4	✓	
Chad	2.692	3.241	3.0		
Comoros	2.717	2.465	2.6		
Democratic Republic of Congo	2.975	3.299	3.1		✓
Côte d'Ivoire	3.250	3.499	3.4		✓
Eritrea	1.992	2.141	2.1		
The Gambia	3.142	3.207	3.2		
Guinea-Bissau	2.500	2.673	2.6	✓	
Haiti	2.858		2.9		✓
Kiribati	2.950	3.050	3.0		
Kosovo	3.550		3.6		✓
Liberia	3.100	3.498	3.3		✓
Madagascar	3.133	3.198	3.2		
Mali	3.367	3.653	3.5		✓
Marshall Islands	2.642	2.900	2.8		
Federated States of Micronesia	2.733	2.950	2.8		
Myanmar	3.050	3.133	3.1		
Sierra Leone	3.267	3.368	3.3	✓	

Country	The World Bank Group's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment	The African Development Bank's or the Asian Development Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment	Harmonized average	Political and peacebuilding missions**	Peacekeeping missions***
Solomon Islands	2.933	3.308	3.1		
Somalia		1.105	1.1	✓	
South Sudan	2.000	2.216	2.1		✓
Sudan	2.425	2.562	2.5		✓
Togo	2.992	3.203	3.1		
Tuvalu	2.792	2.975	2.9		
Yemen	2.967		3.0		
Territories					
West Bank and Gaza				✓	
Blend					
Timor-Leste	3.058	3.392	3.2		✓
Zimbabwe	2.658	2.207	2.4		
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development only					
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-	-	-	✓	
Iraq	-	-	-	✓	
Lebanon	-	-	-	✓	
Libya	-	-	-	✓	
Syria	-	-	-	✓	

* Fragile situations have either a harmonized average Country Policy and Institutional Assessment, or CPIA, rating of 3.2 or less or the presence of a U.N. and/or regional peacekeeping or peacebuilding mission during the past three years. This list includes only International Development Association-eligible countries and nonmember or inactive territories or countries without CPIA data. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, or IBRD, countries with CPIA ratings below 3.2 do not qualify on this list due to nondisclosure of CPIA ratings; IBRD countries that are included here qualify only because of the presence of a peacekeeping, political, or peacebuilding mission—and their CPIA ratings are thus not disclosed.

** Political and peacebuilding missions are specifically defined as the presence of a U.N. and/or regional—African Union, European Union, OAS—peacebuilding and political mission in this country in the past three years.

*** Peacekeeping missions are specifically defined as the presence of a U.N. and/or regional—African Union, European Union, OAS, or NATO—peacekeeping operation in this country in the past three years, with the exclusion of border monitoring operations. For additional information regarding this list, see World Bank, "FCS Information Note and FAQ," available at www.worldbank.org/fragilityand-conflict (last accessed May 2016).

Source: Adapted from World Bank Group, "Harmonized List of Fragile Situations FY16," available at <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/pubdocs/publicdoc/2015/7/700521437416355449/FCSlist-FY16-Final-712015.pdf> (last accessed May 2016).

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John Norris is the Executive Director of the Sustainable Security Initiative at the Center for American Progress. He has served in a number of senior roles in government, international institutions, and nonprofits. In 2014, Norris was appointed by President Barack Obama to the President’s Global Development Council, a body charged with advising the administration on effective development practices. His latest book, *Mary McGrory: The First Queen of Journalism*, was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize.

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The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

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As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

Our Approach

We develop new policy ideas, challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate. With policy teams in major issue areas, American Progress can think creatively at the cross-section of traditional boundaries to develop ideas for policymakers that lead to real change. By employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, we move our ideas aggressively in the national policy debate.

