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Ending Civil Wars: Constraints & Possibilities



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In Defense of Ambition: Building Peaceful & Inclusive Societies in a World on Fire

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Abstract: Fragility creates the conditions for violent intrastate conflict. Its consequences contribute to global disorder and mounting threats to U.S. national security. Significant impediments to effective action in fragile states persist today, even with many years of policy attention and an emerging consensus about its centrality in causing armed conflict. Policy-makers across the U.S. interagency have yet to arrive at a shared consciousness about the challenge of fragility, a shared understanding of the nature of the problem, and the types of capacities that can be comprehensively deployed to address it effectively. This essay describes recent advances in the development sector with regard to fragile states that suggest a way forward for stronger results. The steep challenges of tackling the complex causes of fragility tell us to be measured in our actions, but the experiences of recent progress and the urgency to alleviate human suffering tell us the time is right for greater ambition.

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In the wake of the two world wars, the world experienced significant progress: an increase in the number of democratic states, heartening advances toward eliminating global poverty, and significant decreases in violent conflict. But those positive trends have abruptly reversed in the last decade. Now, a new wave of civil wars, historic levels of migrants and refugees, global pandemics, and increases in violent extremism are fueling a sense of global disorder.

One critical cause for this increase in civil wars and violence can be traced to the challenges of fragile states. Several decades of scholarship and experience have identified the strong correlation between state fragility and higher levels of violent conflict, extreme poverty, violent extremism, and vulnerability to the predations of regional and international powers. In an increasingly interconnected world, fragility poses a greater threat to national and international security than ever before. It also presents pressing moral challenges. However, we have yet to effectively

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organize either the collective resources of the U.S. government or international institutions to address this challenge.

Doing so within U.S. government institutions will require a significant shift in the way U.S. defense, diplomatic, and development capabilities operate, moving away from deeply stovepiped bureaucracies that work without a shared framework to what General Stanley McChrystal has called a “shared consciousness” that enables more cohesive joint action.¹ This means moving from vertical structures that inhibit effective action on complex, interrelated challenges to horizontal approaches that can more nimbly work to prevent the crises associated with states in which the state-society relationship has become dangerously frayed. As noted by Jean-Marie Guéhenno, in the search for effective means to prevent and end civil wars, “intelligent orchestration is the most important strategic variable, and . . . isolated policies, even well-executed ones, are unlikely to produce lasting results unless they are part of an overall coherent and consistent strategy.”²

Promising approaches for addressing fragility have emerged from the development sector, which is grappling with how to prevent significant investments from being overturned by repeated shocks from conflict and disaster. Development is arguably undergoing a paradigm shift, moving from narrowly focused investments designed to spur economic growth and isolated, sector-based programming, to a more systemic approach of managing risk and building resilience to the effects of disaster and conflict. However, unless development, diplomatic, and defense approaches align more consistently to adopt a shared understanding of how to address fragility, development efforts alone will not be successful.

This essay explores the challenge of fragility and its prominent role in fueling “unpredictable instability” and increasing threats to regional, national, and interna-

tional security; notes critical obstacles to applying these approaches more effectively; and identifies promising approaches to addressing fragility that are emerging from the development community. It concludes with both recommendations and a call to action that acknowledge that while anxiety about state fragility and its consequences may be rising, we have the opportunity to pursue new models for a positive future.

Informed by recent conflict research, many policy-makers, especially development policy-makers, agree that nearly all outbreaks of violent intrastate conflict can be traced back to the absence or breakdown of the social contract between people and their government, a condition that policy-makers often refer to as *fragility*. By enabling violent intrastate conflict and other transnational threats, the consequences of fragility pose serious challenges to U.S. national security.

The source of fragility can be an absence of state legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens, effectiveness, or both. Legitimacy is weakened wherever societal and governing institutions are not inclusive or responsive to all identity groups, including minority and marginalized populations. Legitimacy may also be undermined when weak mechanisms exist by which populations can hold governing institutions accountable for performance. Effectiveness is diminished when state-society interactions fail to produce adequate public goods to respond to citizens’ needs for security, health, economic well-being, and social welfare. High levels of fragility – whether caused by illegitimacy, ineffectiveness, or both – create conditions for armed conflict and political instability.

While policy-makers use fragility as a helpful concept for framing a complicated set of problems relating to the state-society relationship, conflict researchers do not test hypotheses about the singular influence of fragility on the risks of conflict. Fragility

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refers to multiple dimensions of the state-society relationship, which would typically be represented in a regression-based model for the outbreak of violent conflict with separate independent variables. However, we think that conflict researchers have successfully made the case that fragility enables the conditions for violent conflict, based on the accumulated evidence from many conflict studies that examine the influence of different structural attributes of the state-society relationship on combined conflict risks.

As Charles Call and Susanna Campbell note, the literature from the past decade is replete with studies presenting robust evidence on the relationship between structural attributes of society and future armed conflict.³ Many of those structural attributes are directly tied to elements of fragile state-society relationships, including variables that align with fragility in terms of low legitimacy, like the presence of factionalized zero-sum political competition, past ethnic conflict, ethnic discrimination, or weak justice systems. In other cases, there are variables that track with fragility in terms of poor effectiveness, such as high infant mortality rates, high youth unemployment rates, low GDP per capita growth rates, or high poverty rates.

But with protection from two oceans, peaceful neighbors, and overwhelming military capabilities, is the United States immune to fragility? In today's world, people, states, and economies are deeply interconnected, and threats quickly cross boundaries and easily spread over large geographic distances. Fragility has already tested U.S. national security and will continue to do so if left unaddressed.

Fragility is the common denominator running through some of the steepest security challenges the United States faces. A growing number of composite indices that directly measure state-society dysfunction have made it possible to track and rank key elements of fragility at the national and

subnational levels.⁴ The combined insights from these efforts have clarified the nexus between fragility and multiple challenges to U.S. national security as well as international security: the top seven states responsible for refugees and migrants rank at the top of nearly every index on fragility;⁵ five of the top seven most fragile states also represent the top five sources of terrorist attacks;⁶ the fifty most fragile states on earth are home to 43 percent of the world's most impoverished people, or roughly three billion people;⁷ and a majority of the unprecedented sixty-five million people currently displaced by violent conflict around the globe are fleeing the forty ongoing internal conflicts worldwide.⁸

These conflicts have become increasingly internationalized, as fragile states in turmoil are more vulnerable to the predations of regional and international powers. Internationalized internal conflicts, like those unfolding in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Ukraine, were a rarity twenty-five years ago, accounting for approximately 3 percent of the world's conflicts. Today, internationalized internal conflicts account for one-third of all global conflicts, have contributed to the 500 percent increase in global battle deaths over the past ten years, and have pushed conflict deaths to a twenty-five-year high.⁹ Civil war in Syria alone has taken a staggering toll on human life; estimates range from 250,000 to 470,000 lost in the conflict since 2011.

Further, these internationalized conflicts have become much harder to solve, providing proxy ground for external powers to manipulate fragile institutions, exercise their own interests, and flex their muscles, thereby raising concerns about the potential for renewed great-power conflicts playing out in highly vulnerable fragile states. These conflicts are lasting longer and costing more; various estimates of the costs of global conflict range from \$9 to \$13.6 trillion per year.¹⁰

Finally, these dynamics are playing out in a world that changes faster, is more complex, and is more inextricably connected than at any time in history. Fifteen billion devices were connected to the Internet in 2015; that is more than two devices for every person in the world and more than double the seven billion devices connected in 2011. However, this greater connectivity has cut both ways, and access is infamously being exploited by organizations like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State to spread radical and violent ideologies and recruit foreign fighters.

Fragile states often lack the capacity to extend the reach of government over the entirety of their respective territories. As a result, illicit transnational forces (such as terrorist and organized criminal groups) often hold territory in fragile states.¹¹ Transnational flows of illicit arms, drugs, and people are increasingly sophisticated and intertwined. And, driven out of their homes by violent conflict and poverty, historic levels of refugees and migrants have reached the shores of Europe, contributing to the political destabilization of key U.S. allies in Europe.

Faced with the threat of pandemic disease, fragile states often lack the institutional capacity to respond quickly and effectively to control the spread of new outbreaks.¹² With the experience of an outbreak of Ebola in three fragile states of West Africa in 2015 and the more recent outbreak of Zika in parts of Latin America, the specter of uncontrolled pandemics has never loomed larger. In the context of a highly interconnected world, fragility compounds the threat of the spread of pandemic disease to the United States.

In the previous issue of *Dædalus*, Stewart Patrick argues that the threats emanating from fragile or failed states typically lack the potential to pose a significant or existential threat to the United States – we do not disagree.¹³ However, the many challenges ema-

nating from fragile states do create circumstances that test U.S. national security interests. They impede the ability of the United States to attain foreign-policy objectives pertaining to the security of allies, the stability of key regions, and the promotion of a liberal international order that ultimately serves U.S. security interests. Whenever major civil wars or other types of crises erupt in fragile states, the deleterious results only steepen the ongoing uphill challenge for U.S. leadership to strengthen international security arrangements that serve to protect human rights and dignity for all global citizens.

In addition to the security challenges presented by fragility, the moral challenge also looms large. In late 2017, four of the most fragile states on any index – Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen, and Northeastern Nigeria – were still teetering on the edge of famine, putting twenty million people at risk of severe malnutrition or starvation. From a moral standpoint, the human suffering engendered by dysfunctional interactions between governments and their people places a responsibility on the international community to respond. Whether fragility compounds the spread of a pandemic disease, contributes to famine, or enables the conditions for armed violence, the devastating toll on human life demands a remedy. In this respect, we wholeheartedly echo Patrick's highlighting of the moral dimension of addressing fragility. We would only emphasize that the moral challenge of fragility extends beyond the humanitarian response to crises. As these crises emerge from fragile settings not because of bad luck, but because of structural attributes, the moral imperative to address fragility extends to responding to its root causes, not just to the crises and human suffering that are often its consequence.

Given the significant threats and costs of fragility, why has effective policy for sup-

porting country transitions out of fragility remained elusive? On paper, Republican and Democratic administrations alike have made “weak,” “failed,” and “fragile” states a priority in their national security strategies.¹⁴ In the late 1990s, the Clinton administration recognized that states “unable to provide basic governance, safety and security, and opportunities for their populations” could potentially “[generate] internal conflict, mass migration, famine, epidemic diseases, environmental disasters, mass killings and aggression against neighboring states or ethnic groups – events which can threaten regional security and U.S. interests.”¹⁵ After 9/11, the Bush administration was primarily concerned about the exploitation of weak states by terrorists. And before the transfer of power to President Trump, the Obama administration’s national security strategy stated: “fragile and conflict-affected states incubate and spawn infectious disease, illicit weapons and drug smugglers, and destabilizing refugee flows. Too often, failures in governance and endemic corruption hold back the potential of rising regions.”¹⁶ But the United States has not gotten measurably better at achieving its desired outcomes in these environments. In practice, fragility rarely becomes the focused area of effort, despite receiving significant attention in foundational strategic documents. Each situation is different, but there are some common reasons for this difficult reality.

A crisis-driven focus. First, administrations inevitably become hostage to the latest terrible crisis and, by necessity, focus energy and resources on responding to rather than preventing crisis. The cost of this approach has become increasingly untenable, with an ever greater reliance on reactive tools, including military action, deployment of peacekeeping missions, and increasingly higher levels of humanitarian assistance. The result is a persistent focus on fragile

states, but only after crisis hits, when action is more urgent and expensive, options are more limited, and problems are harder to solve. For example, the 2014 Ebola outbreak quickly spread from West Africa to the United States and resulted in Congress passing a significant package of postcrisis assistance intended to build greater, longer-term global health security in the region.¹⁷ These are, unfortunately, the kind of investments that rarely occur until after an attention-grabbing threat has landed.

Bureaucratic impediments. Second, the vertical structures of government bureaucracies remain a significant impediment. The U.S. government is organized to divide security, development, and political action, each with its own frameworks, theories of change, and time horizons, precluding more effective joint approaches. A confusing web of authorities and areas of responsibility serve to ignite turf battles and create incentives for competition rather than collaboration.

In addition, agencies are geographically organized in inconsistent ways, making it harder to have a shared analysis. The Department of Defense (DOD) is organized regionally, the Department of State is organized to operate via government-to-government interaction, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has a hybrid approach, with both state-based and regional operations. Those differences, coupled with the different capabilities that each bring to bear in fragile environments, can lead the three D’s (diplomacy, development, and defense) to analyze fragile contexts within different frameworks. The results are often cast in terms of the analyzing agency’s set of capabilities, which can undermine the potential for coordinated action.

Efforts are further hampered by congressional constraints that impose budget inflexibility through earmarks and competitive congressional committee juris-

dictions. For example, in 2010, the State Department, DOD, and USAID brought a carefully crafted joint action plan for Iraq to Congress that required presentation to two different appropriations committees. The Armed Services Committee fully funded the DOD plan, while the State Department and USAID were allotted only a fraction of the necessary funding by their committee, invalidating the core assumptions and effectiveness of the plan.¹⁸

Lack of a shared consciousness. The most important challenge, however, is the absence of a “shared consciousness,” as termed by General Stanley McChrystal, among executive branch agencies about exactly why, what, how, and when to engage collectively in fragile states. The result is that each branch essentially operates with blinders on, limiting its ability to see the larger ecosystem of the challenge.

A recent study by Stanford University, Chatham House, and the United States Institute of Peace underlined this challenge in a retrospective look at coalition efforts in Afghanistan over the past decade.¹⁹ The study found that there were essentially three separate, simultaneous lines of effort during this period: intelligence efforts, which sought information on Al Qaeda; military units, which fought the Taliban; and development actors that helped the Afghan state and society to rebuild. However, the methods employed by the intelligence and military actors served to exacerbate corruption and undermine the trust of the people in their state, undercutting the significant investments into rebuilding the state that were meant to strengthen the confidence of the Afghan people in the first place.

This example is a stark illustration of how each effort was pursued with a different definition of the problem, with differing timelines and frameworks for actions and fundamentally different goals. Typically, the development community looks at longer-term change, while defense and

diplomatic efforts address more immediate security and political problems. However, without more closely aligned goals, progress on the issues of fragility will remain limited, and, too frequently, short-term gains will result in longer-term crises.

Meaningful progress will require a concerted effort to transform the business model of government, making it more proactive, adaptive, and integrated. A new approach requires a shared consciousness among the U.S. government interagency about how best to deploy the tools of U.S. foreign policy, and the horizontal effectiveness to work with one another: diplomacy and security must be achieved locally; development and security are political concerns; and diplomacy and development cannot be separated from security and stability.

This type of cohesive framework for putting states back together after a major conflict was articulated in the Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction’s 2003 report, *Play to Win*.²⁰ The Commission stated that the priority areas requiring substantive local, U.S., and international community effort were security, justice and reconciliation, economic and social well-being, and governance and participation, and the report enumerated specific goals and tasks for short-, medium-, and long-term transition. The Commission also cautioned that a successful approach required mutually reinforcing and coherent action across all four pillars of engagement and that success would be jeopardized if security, justice, economic, or governance issues were addressed in isolation from one another.

The Commission drew heavily upon the key lessons learned during the Balkans conflict and its aftermath. Unfortunately, by the time of its release in 2003, attention had already shifted to new imperatives imposed by the 9/11 attacks, underscoring the perennial problem of lessons lost as administrations and priorities change.

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In the very recent past, three important changes have emerged within the development sector that demonstrate the potential for overcoming some of the obstacles described above. These changes signal a paradigm shift in strategy away from more traditional humanitarian and development approaches to a more integrated approach for working in fragile states. Traditional development efforts have long focused on investing in productive economic growth and advancing key objectives in health, agriculture, or education with a steady determination to steer clear of politics.

This approach was mirrored in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) announced by the UN in 2000. The MDGs comprised a fifteen-year plan for realizing eight global goals to end extreme poverty, including realizing universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal and child health, and developing a global partnership for development. Despite these ambitious objectives, the MDGs conspicuously avoided any of the challenges posed by conflict, inequity, or lack of human rights and justice. At their conclusion in 2015, poverty was increasingly concentrated in the most fragile countries.

This result did not come as a surprise to many. As early as the late 1990s, USAID sought to address the need to understand the political dynamics of development and instituted a pioneering initiative to include democracy promotion and, later, conflict analysis as part of its development agenda. USAID also released its *Fragile States Strategy* in early 2005.

Then, in 2011, the World Bank released its landmark *World Development Report: Conflict, Security and Development*, calling for a different approach to help conflict-affected states emerge from cycles of conflict by investing in an integrated set of activities emphasizing citizen security, access to justice, and job creation. The report proposed an

evidence-based framework that emphasized institutional legitimacy as fundamental to stability. More recent reports in 2016 and 2017 on states of fragility from the International Institute for Economics and Peace and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have advanced this work to develop further evidence for frameworks that address the challenge of fragility.²¹ Finally, both the UN and World Bank have recently adopted conflict prevention as core priorities, a commitment highlighted by the release in October 2017 of *Pathways to Peace* – an unprecedented joint report that presents a comprehensive overview of global evidence pertaining to conflict prevention.²²

These reports were key in articulating the evidence base and developing the frameworks for addressing fragility. However, in the U.S. government, real change has remained hampered by chronic underfunding and a lack of full acceptance by many humanitarian and development professionals, especially those skittish of becoming too engaged with “politics.” However, three key developments have helped catalyze an accelerated shift from more traditional relief and development approaches to a greater focus on fragility.

Fragile states self-identify for the first time. First, in 2011, the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding announced the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States at the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4) held in Busan, South Korea, the quadrennial gathering of international development actors to forge key agreements and chart global development progress. The New Deal – based on an agreement between self-identified fragile-state governments (the g7+), international donors, and civil society organizations and designed explicitly to create more inclusive, accountable systems of governance – called for new ways to invest financially and politically in fragile states.²³

The New Deal's five peace-building and state-building goals build on a growing collective wisdom on the most effective ways to help fragile countries move toward greater peace: foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution; establish and strengthen people's security; address injustices and increase people's access to justice; generate employment and improve livelihoods; and manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.²⁴

Though the New Deal was not officially incorporated into the main platform of HLF-4, it was included as one of eight streams of activity, representing a significant shift in the mainstream development world. Unfortunately, support and engagement of the New Deal among G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) has been limited to development agencies. To realize its full transformative potential, support for the New Deal will have to be expanded in both donor governments and fragile states to include security, political, and development departments and be championed by civil society with more extensive community engagement.²⁵ The potential of the New Deal is further limited by the inability of most g7+ countries thus far to demonstrate proof of concept; instead, many member states have continued to descend into further conflict. However, it retains promise as a model for the kind of compact that could create greater coherence and effectiveness in providing a carrot-and-stick approach to those states trapped in fragility and conflict.

Sustainable development goals prioritize inclusivity and accountability. Second, as the MDGs approached their conclusion in 2015, UN member states began negotiating the Global Goals for the next fifteen years. The MDGs' track record demonstrated that the elimination of extreme poverty could not advance without tackling the messy dy-

namics of exclusion, conflict, and fragility, thus opening the door for change.

Despite initial opposition from member states reluctant to introduce politics into the development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 recognize that development investments cannot be sustained unless states and societies are inclusive, accountable, and just. Significantly, SDG Goal 16 seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. The g7+ countries were among those most active in advocating for this goal. In this way, the SDGs represent a deep shift in the collective mindset of development practitioners and has already ignited a new approach.

Refugee crises fuel rethinking of humanitarian architecture. Third, just as the Global Goals were adopted, the refugee and migrant crisis of 2015 began breaking on the shores of Europe. The protracted conflicts of Africa and Afghanistan were suddenly overlaid with new wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, and a renewed conflict in Iraq. As both refugees and migrants overflowed beyond the saturated frontline states, they sought refuge and a better life in Europe. As Sarah Kenyon Lischer has detailed, the global humanitarian system strained to address these multiple crises simultaneously, revealing cracks in the long-standing system of safety nets and necessarily prompting a rethinking of the business model of humanitarian assistance.²⁶

In May 2015, the first-ever Global Humanitarian Summit was held in Turkey, where more than nine thousand humanitarian, development, and political participants and fifty-five heads of state from 173 countries convened to seek solutions to the human suffering created by acute violent conflict and historic displacement. Key agreements focused on breaking down the stovepipes

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between humanitarian and development activities, with a greater emphasis on understanding and addressing the drivers of violent conflict. As a result, the World Bank is opening new windows of concessionary funding for states like Jordan and Lebanon to better address the strain from the massive onslaught of refugees and to forestall them from collapsing into crises as well. The World Bank's International Development Association's IDA18 is the largest replenishment of IDA resources by donors in the organization's fifty-six-year history, and has a bold, new focus on increasing attention and investment in fragile states, acknowledging the core development challenge they represent.

The promising developments described above have helped codify the international community's collective wisdom both on what to do and, increasingly, on how to prevent fragility or mitigate state failure. At least five important principles have emerged for guiding policy and programs in fragile states: 1) invest in sustainable security that entitles civilians to justice; 2) support legitimate governments, characterized by inclusive politics, accountable institutions, and reconciliation; 3) create conditions for inclusive, equitable economic growth; 4) enable locally led change by training and equipping local partners and investing in country systems; and 5) sustain efforts over time, since change can take a generation or more to reveal itself. The way forward for supporting fragile state transitions to resilience depends on putting these principles into practice.

Many promising initiatives for addressing fragility were instituted in the Obama administration, both within USAID and across the interagency. For example, the U.S. government established and provided active support for values-based institutions that continue to provide normative support for more resilient democracies, in-

cluding the Community of Democracies, Open Government Partnership, Inter-American Democratic Charter, and SDG Goal 16. And within the U.S. government, many efforts have focused on breaking down internal stovepipes and linking early warning with early action, such as the Atrocities Prevention Board and a new Center for Resilience within USAID.

The State Department has sought to recognize the role of the private sector, faith leaders, and civil society in a world that is no longer simply the domain of diplomats. The National Security Council sought to establish a regular series of deputies' meetings to take up the issue of those fragile countries that warrant increased focus and attention. The Obama administration also negotiated critical new presidential directives to create greater interagency coherence, including Presidential Policy Directive 6 on Global Development and Presidential Policy Directive 23 on U.S. Security Sector Assistance Policy. In the first year of the Trump administration – with its national security strategy still forthcoming – it remains too early to assess how the current administration will put principles for fragile state engagement into practice.

In 2016, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for New American Security, and the United States Institute of Peace convened a bipartisan study group composed of former U.S. government officials and private-sector and NGO leaders specifically to capture key lessons and make recommendations to the next administration.

These recommendations offer a policy framework that takes the lessons of the last three administrations and builds on the collective wisdom of what to do based on a “four S approach”: strategic, selective, systemic, and sustained. Specific recommendations are organized into three compacts: one domestic, both within the administration and within Congress; one

within the international community; and one within fragile states.

Most important, that study acknowledges that the United States cannot tackle fragility everywhere, but can apply strategic and selective criteria to determine both priority areas for action, where it is most likely to have a positive impact, as well as specific efforts for enabling more systemic action that uses all the capabilities of the U.S. government over a sustained period. Colombia is an example of how this approach can result in success: Plan Colombia combined security, diplomatic, and development investments over a sustained period spanning three administrations. This approach helped transform a failed narcostate that threatened U.S. security into a partner with a rising economy and a new peace agreement ending fifty years of conflict.

Fragility creates the conditions for violent intrastate conflict. The consequences contribute to global disorder and mounting threats to U.S. national security. This essay has described the significant impediments to effective action in fragile states, even with emerging consensus about its centrality in causing armed conflict and many years of policy attention. Although we appreciate the scope of the challenges described here, we also think that recent advances in the development sector with regard to fragile states suggest a way forward for stronger results.

A bold, aspirational vision for a future world order and a healthy dose of realism are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are mutually reinforcing. We can be realistic about America's ability and will to help shape that world order without relinquishing our commitment to peace, stability, human rights, and effective governance based on the rule of law. We can also be realistic about the ability and will of fragile states to overcome profound obstacles to economic growth and inclusive governance

without declaring such transformations impossible.

The last seventy years have brought the world unparalleled peace and security. But there are critical challenges to address in the institutions that have developed over time, both within the United States and internationally. Our challenge is to reform these institutions to more effectively meet the challenge of fragility rather than yield to the temptation to jettison their fundamental structures in search of illusory simple solutions. The experiences of recent progress in tackling the challenges of fragile states coupled with our appreciation of the steep problems ahead tell us to be both ambitious and measured in our actions as we seek to lead a community of nations into the uncertain future.

While existing institutional architecture may be poorly positioned to respond to today's complexity without significant reform, the international community has a history of delivering on ambition. Nearly seventy years ago, from the ashes of conflict, the world united to establish the Bretton Woods institutions: the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. The United States and the international community have long proven their ability to do hard things.

In that spirit, we close with a call to remain seized by the challenge to discover new ways to strengthen our understanding of and to compile evidence about fragile states. For example, more comprehensive evidence about the cost-effectiveness of long-term peace-building investments remains elusive. The policy case for expanded engagement in fragile states for the purpose of long-term conflict prevention would be strengthened considerably with compelling evidence about the relatively modest costs of prevention versus the immense costs of crisis response. The debate is not about whether peace-building investments cost less than humanitarian

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responses to crisis. Of course they do. The case that must be made is more complicated than that and depends on combining evidence about the results of foreign assistance with informed speculation about a counterfactual. For any fragile state that has received significant foreign assistance to address the sources of fragility, what evidence exists that those investments actually reduced the likelihood of a future outbreak of major armed conflict? Second, what would have been the estimated costs of the international humanitarian or military response to such an outbreak? To advance more convincing arguments about the cost-effectiveness of more coherent policies and programs that address fragility, we urge researchers to innovate and build evidence around these claims.

A recent survey of more than three hundred impact evaluations of programs designed to address state-society relations found significant gaps in the evidence base on the effectiveness of such programs.²⁷ For example, rigorous evidence from program interventions tend to be concentrated in a small number of countries. Evaluations of

programs designed to strengthen the transparency, accountability, or inclusiveness of political institutions are particularly rare. The study's authors found that in the countries with the largest populations facing the steepest challenges of governance, very little or no evidence exists about the effectiveness of development interventions.

We argued earlier that we have two decades of evidence that fragility enables violent conflict and that the presence of citizen security, inclusive justice, and economies increase stability and peace. However, policymakers across the U.S. interagency have yet to arrive at a shared consciousness about the challenge of fragility, a shared understanding of the nature of the problem, and the types of capacities that can be comprehensively deployed to address it effectively. That remains a steep ambition, but one that can be supported and accelerated with the development of better evidence about what works in fragile contexts. With an ever-improving understanding of how diplomatic, development, and defense actors can combine to tackle fragility, that ambition can be realized.

ENDNOTES

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² Jean-Marie Guéhenno, "The United Nations & Civil War," *Dædalus* 147 (1) (Winter 2018).

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¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Center for American Progress, National Security and International Policy Team, “State Legitimacy, Fragile States, and U.S. National Security,” Center for American Progress, September 12, 2016, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2016/09/12/143789/state-legitimacy-fragile-states-and-u-s-national-security/>.

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¹³ Stewart Patrick, “Civil Wars & Transnational Threats: Mapping the Terrain, Assessing the Links,” *Dædalus* 146 (4) (Fall 2017).

¹⁴ The Clinton administration’s 2000 National Security Strategy (NSS) lists failed states as one of six “threats to U.S. interests.” The White House, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 1999). The Bush administration’s 2002 NSS stated: “The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to national interests as strong states.” The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2002). And the 2006 Bush administration’s NSS stated: “Weak and impoverished states and ungoverned areas are not only a threat to their people and a burden on regional economies, but are also susceptible to exploitation by terrorists, tyrants, and international criminals.” The White House, *The National Security Strategy 2006* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2006). Lastly, the Obama administration’s 2015 strategy stated: “we will prioritize efforts that address the top strategic risks to our interests . . . [including] significant security consequences associated with weak or failing states (including mass atrocities, regional spillover, and transnational organized crime).” The White House, *National Security Strategy 2015* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2015).

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- ²³ The International Dialogue is a unique multistakeholder partnership between the g7+ group of countries affected by conflict and fragility, donors from OECD countries, and civil society organizations. The New Deal outlined new modes of operation for donor nations, including committing to locally owned and led development priorities, and making planning processes more inclusive in the target countries. This new method of working was designed to promote five foundational Peace-Building and State-Building Goals. International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, <http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/en/>.
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