



# FRAGILITY 2.0: IDEAS TO ACTION

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State fragility remains a pressing global challenge as civil wars, threats of famine, and extreme poverty continue to cluster in unstable places where the social contract has broken down.<sup>1</sup> Fragile states are seedbeds for extremist groups that often combine with transnational criminal networks trafficking in drugs, arms, and people.

According to the World Bank, 2 billion people live in countries affected by fragility and conflict, and they constitute the youngest and fastest growing populations, globally. Fragile states are the primary source of historic levels of people displaced by violent conflict, which rose even further in 2017, to 68.5 million—equal to the combined populations of California, Texas, and Maryland. Today, refugee flows threaten to destabilize regional neighbors and continue to roil the politics of European allies.

## State fragility defined

The 2016 Fragility Study Group convened by the Center for New American Security, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and U.S. Institute of Peace defines state fragility as *“the absence or breakdown of a social contract between people and their government. Fragile States suffer from deficits of institutional capacity and political legitimacy that increase the risk of instability and violent conflict and sap the state of its resilience to disruptive shocks.”*

The challenge of state fragility, framed as both a global security threat and as the principal obstacle to reaching the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is prompting accelerated efforts to create the clear evidence and joint frameworks needed for effective action, creating an even more urgent opportunity—and necessity—to harness the current consensus and apply lessons learned.

Over the past decade and a half, a series of landmark reports and initiatives have produced an evidence base and created a growing consensus on needed approaches to address fragility more effectively.<sup>2</sup> Building on this foundation, a flurry of new efforts since 2017 have further consolidated key learnings. International institutions, which have been under considerable scrutiny for their poor track record in fragile states, have notably increased their focus and attention on constructing portfolios and tools tailored to the conditions of fragility. Key recent reports and initiatives include:

- *Pathways to Peace*, released in 2017 as the first joint U.N. and World Bank report on fragility and peace building, makes the business case for investing more in prevention in response to the surge in

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violent conflict since 2010, with rising human and financial costs. It notes the importance of more investment in inclusive development and reconciliation in the fragmented societies that characterize fragile states. It emphasizes the need for more complementary efforts of often stove-piped institutions and sectors, especially entities working on security, diplomacy, and development.

- *World Bank World Development Report 2017 on Governance and the Rule of Law* identifies potential incentives for elites to engage more constructively with reform processes, providing important analysis on the core political barriers that often frustrate progress in fragile states.
- *The World Bank 2018 IDA Replenishment* dedicated US\$14.9 billion in investment in fragile states, accompanied by new, more flexible rules, increased emphasis on risk assessments and mitigation tools, and revised staffing and operational policies to improve performance. Bank leadership has identified this initiative as a primary priority.
- *The IMF and Fragile States Evaluation Report of 2018*, by the Independent Evaluation Office of the IMF, concluded that despite elevating fragile and conflict-affected states as a priority, the IMF has not made the necessary changes to achieve impact, including longer-term horizons, appropriate financing instruments and partnership with fragile states.
- *Escaping the Fragility Trap*, released in 2018 by the Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development, led by former U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron, provides a compelling summary of recommendations for how to approach fragility more effectively.

## Current consensus

These efforts share several core principles, which serve to consolidate a set of key lessons that underpin a new model for addressing fragility:

- **Success requires local ownership:** This nearly universally cited lesson reveals that change cannot be imposed from the outside. External good will, resources, and military action cannot create the conditions for sustainable peace without an inclusive political settlement and a minimum level of capacity that enables citizens to have confidence in their government and to develop and lead their own country. Pursuing this approach requires confronting the core challenge of helping countries escape the fragility trap, since, by definition, fragile states have weak and/or illegitimate governments, typically characterized by exclusionary policies and fragmented societies. This is an especially challenging approach for donors, as it may require relinquishing frameworks that work in western democracies but not necessarily in countries emerging from decades of conflict. The Cameron report addresses this issue by citing the potential damage of imposing elections too early, which can further polarize a fragmented society. Instead, states and societies need to find their own way forward out of the “syndrome of fragility.”<sup>3</sup>
- **Commit to sustained and realistic timelines:** Transforming fragile states can be a generational undertaking, as governance and development problems are usually deeply rooted. These sustained timelines defy the span of donor attention and political processes and require an increased appetite for risk and strategic patience. However, a longer-term approach is important for setting more realistic

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expectations of change and importantly is critical to avoid the stop and start of resource flows that can cripple more effective action. Take the example of Plan Colombia, in which the U.S. government (USG) offered a US\$10 billion aid package to Colombia, which was successfully sustained over three U.S. administrations.

- **...but with early wins:** Coupling long-term commitment with quick wins is crucial for creating confidence on all sides that change is possible, both among local populations and among donors. Identifying quick, achievable opportunities for progress can buy time for the tougher changes that can take decades.
- **Prioritize and execute with flexibility:** In fragile and conflict-affected states, the challenge is the need for investment in every sector. The primacy of “jobs, justice, and security” has been widely cited since the 2011 World Development Report<sup>4</sup> and remains a strong contender for top priorities in most contexts. However, the overriding lesson is the need to have flexibility in pursuing the very context-specific long-term course required, without predetermined or earmarked requirements. The specific context of a country must drive the course of action, and it will almost certainly change over time.
- **Provide incentives for mutual accountability and risk tolerance:** There is no right answer about what to prioritize, but there must be a consensus and commitment that involves all major actors, among both partners. *The idea of compacts between fragile states and donors provides a potentially valuable organizing tool.* It enables local action and invests in local capacities, while also creating a mechanism for mutual accountability and risk mitigation by creating conditionalities that are jointly owned rather than imposed unilaterally. Importantly, implementors should not be penalized for admitting failure, particularly when efforts that fall short are based on the best lessons and evidence, as such attempts can lead to improved practices. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) relies upon a compact model, with transparent lending criteria and a Fiscal Accountability Plan that documents how the money will be spent—although by design it focuses on states that are more stable. As envisioned by the Fragile States New Deal, the creation of the compact includes extensive engagement with civil society and youth, providing opportunities to strengthen the state-society compact.
- **Commit to shared frameworks for coordinated action:** Compacts can also serve to create greater cohesion among donors, reducing the cacophony of competition and repetition that often results in high-profile fragile states. Importantly, compacts or other frameworks such as the 2018 USG Stabilization Assistance Review can help drive the significant change required in the interaction and coherence of the security, political/diplomatic, and humanitarian and development systems that are too often operating on different timelines with differing objectives.
- **Leverage the private sector:** The need for inclusive economic growth is almost universal in fragile states, which require a host of policy changes within fragile states as well as with donor partners. The World Bank and IMF are both working to change policies and frameworks that can more effec-

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tively provide critical budget support and enable a more conducive environment for private sector development and important domestic resource mobilization. Given the reluctance of most foreign investors to enter such unstable markets, initiatives to support local private sector development and economic growth hold particular promise.

- **Reduce violence and provide citizen security:** Inclusive peace processes, a security force that prioritizes citizen security, and inclusive access to justice are at the heart of SDG Goal 16 and essential for supporting the successful transition of any fragile state. The Fragile States New Deal includes peace building as one of its five key goals, given the prevalence of simmering, unresolved grievances and resulting violence in fragile states that can undercut and overturn all other efforts.
- **Keep inclusive politics at the center:** Ultimately, politics will drive success or create failure. Reviews of the New Deal for Fragile States have noted that one central weakness was the focus on technocratic implementation of compacts by the planning and finance ministries of both fragile states and their partners, without the participation of either defense or foreign affairs ministries. This shortcoming arose on the part of the United States as well, since only USAID engaged with the New Deal. In addition, one evaluation found that “implementation has been dominated by technical response. Normative commitments to inclusivity are proving difficult to translate into practice.”<sup>5</sup> Yet inclusion is closely linked with potential progress, with almost all reviews recommending that solutions and plans be inclusive of civil society, women, and other groups that are marginalized in a specific country.

These lessons underscore the difficulty of success for fragile states. Yet, there are some signs of hope, in the cases of Tunisia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, and even in the perennial tough case of Somalia, which has a promising new government. However, without changing the approach, short-term, stove-piped, earmarked, non-coordinated, and donor-led interventions by the international community will certainly continue to fall short—or worse—exacerbate the fissures and tensions within fragile states.

## Promising U.S. government developments

There are some promising developments within the U.S. that extend the concepts and frameworks of fragility from the development world into security and diplomacy and provide the basis for significant progress:

- **A New Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas:** In 2018, the USG released a joint DOD/State/USAID report that for the first time provided a shared definition of what “stabilization” means and the respective roles of each agency. This document enshrines many of the key lessons for more effective action, including important bureaucratic changes that within the government that address stovepipes and lack of shared frameworks across the interagency.
- **AFRICOM 2017 Posture Statement:** In early 2018, AFRICOM Commander General Waldhauser delivered testimony to the U.S. Congress that outlined the current strategic approach of the U.S. military command that encompasses the continent of Africa. *“Together, we work to address the*

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*root causes of violent extremism, lack of accountable government systems, poor education opportunities, and social and economic deficiencies to achieve long-term, sustainable impact in Africa.”*

- [Task Force for Addressing the Root Causes of Violent Extremism in Fragile States](#), is championed by Senator Lindsay Graham (R-SC), and required by the 2017 Appropriations Bill, directs the U.S. Institute of Peace to support a Task Force that will make specific recommendations for how the USG can more effectively tackle the threat of violent extremism. The Task Force is co-chaired by former New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean and former Congressman Lee Hamilton, who previously were co-chairs of the 9/11 Commission and who consider this issue a vital part of a long arc of unfinished business that was first raised in their Commission report from more than a decade ago.

In addition, there is movement within the U.S. Congress to address the core institutional barriers within the USG to addressing fragility more effectively:

- [The Global Fragility and Violence Reduction Act of 2018](#) was introduced in the House by a strong bipartisan group including Congressmen Eliot Engel (NY-D), Ted Poe (TX-R), Michael McCaul (TX-R), Adam Smith (WA-D), Bill Keating (MA-D), and Paul Cook (CA-R). The House bill emphasizes the importance of sustained time frames, coordination of development, security and diplomacy across the USG interagency, better alignment of relevant international and multilateral organizations, and requires ten pilot countries with “10-year mission-led plans” to address the specific issues of fragility and instability that cause violence. A companion bill in the Senate is currently being drafted.
- [The Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act of 2018 \(BUILD Act\)](#) was introduced in both the House and Senate, proposing the creation of a U.S. International Development Finance Corporation “to mobilize and facilitate the participation of private sector capital and skills in the economic development of less developed countries...and countries in transition from nonmarket to market economies” through loans, investments and other forms of support and promotion of private sector investment in international development projects. The Act combines the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) with the USAID’s Development Credit Authority for a more streamlined effort to provide incentives for private sector development in more fragile environments. The bill gives priority to areas that are the most underdeveloped and subject to extreme poverty, fragility, and violence.

## Translating consensus to action

The search for successful, coordinated, and sustained efforts to address fragility has been an area of focus and concern for the past decade. Despite a growing global economy and increased attention and action to the problem of fragile states, success has remained elusive, even as the core challenges of fragility are exacerbated by the changing global landscape.

The rise of new regional powers and the re-emergence of great power competition is further complicating the challenges of fragile states, which are particularly vulnerable to the predations of these powers. China’s voracious investments throughout Africa and Asia are outside the normative frameworks that prioritize inclusiveness and accountability. Conflicts such as those in Yemen and Syria are prolonged by the interests

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of external actors, and countries like Ukraine have fallen prey to Russian advancements. Turkey and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have increasingly projected power into the Horn of Africa, taking over ports and basing soldiers from Somalia to Eritrea. Without greater resilience that comes from emerging out of fragility, fragile states will increasingly be unable to resist external influences and risk greater conflict and continued poverty.

Numerous bureaucratic and political hurdles have created barriers that keep the United States and international partners from fully applying new frameworks and shared lessons for doing business differently in fragile states. However, in the face of such a strong body of evidence, significant new reforms and new initiatives, both within the IFIs, the USG and increasingly among development, political, and security actors, the question is whether there is finally enough political will to move these ideas into sustained, meaningful action.

The Marshall Plan is often cited as the extraordinary innovation that enabled the world to recover from the ravages of World War II, with a bold vision for harnessing international partners and the private sector to rebuild a devastated Europe. Arguably, there is a similar level of challenge facing the international community today, with every indication of it worsening into the future.

**What kind of coalition, domestically and internationally, will be required to develop the political will, the partnerships, and the institutions necessary to turn a decade of good ideas into action?**

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  - 2 The 2011 *World Bank Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development*; the 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation agreement on the New Deal; the inclusion of Goal 16 in the 2015 U.N. Global Sustainable Development Goals that promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, access to justice for all and effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions.
  - 3 Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development. "Escaping the Fragility Trap, Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development." International Growth Center. April 2018. <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Escaping-the-fragility-trap.pdf>.
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