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NONSTATE ARMED ACTORS AND THE U.S. GLOBAL FRAGILITY STRATEGY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: We have an extraordinary set of speakers, starting with a keynote by Ms. Stephanie Williams, who, until recently, was the acting special representative of the U.N. secretary general in Libya, and followed by a very knowledgeable panel, consisting of Dr. Patrick Quirk, of the International Republican Institute, and also my colleague at Brookings, Dr. Frances Brown, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Dr. George Ingram, another distinguished colleague of mine, at Brookings. I will introduce each of our speakers in more detail, later on.

Nonstate armed actors, be they militants, terrorist, criminal groups, or pro-government militias, have been a defining feature of international relations and U.S. foreign policy for the past two decades. Efforts to prevent their emergence and the emergence of violent conflict, or at least to mitigate their effects and improve government, has been at the center of U.S. and international stabilization effort, from wars in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, to areas of intense highly violent criminality, such as in the Northern Triangle of Central America.

However, many of the stabilization efforts have often been challenging to implement, and often been challenged by competing priorities. In 2019, nonetheless, the U.S. Congress recognized the crucial importance of stabilization efforts, elevating them to a level of law, when it the passed the Global Fragility Act, that the Biden administration will now be implementing.

In the -- a few recent years, geopolitical situation has changed, and now intersects with the issue of nonstate armed actors. Heightened rivalries and power competition, the rise of the centrality of the Indo-Pacific Region, however, in no way eliminate the role, impact, and indeed profound effect of nonstate armed actors. The new geopolitics merely adds new layers to the issue and new complexities, as actors, such as China and Russia, are or will be increasingly interacting with nonstate armed actors. Sometimes, fielding nonstate armed actors, such as private security companies, themselves, and as many other actors in the international system, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, also, engage with them.

But of course, it's not just external actors who engage with nonstate armed actors, local governments do so, too, either by sponsoring militias that combat some of the criminal groups or militant

groups or terrorist groups or use nonstate armed actors for delivering governance in areas that they are not able or willing to do so, themselves. Examples abound from Bangladesh, Nigeria, to Colombia, Venezuela, and Jamaica.

The COVID-19 pandemic is yet another significant factor in the relationship between states and nonstate armed actors, changing the balance of power between the two toward nonstate armed actors. Around the world, governments have faced catastrophic collapse of GDP. In many countries, the level of economic decline are in levels unseen, really, since World War II (inaudible) 8%, 10% of GDP.

The weakening of budget, of course, means that there will be further strain for resources to be devoted to police and law enforcement or even military actions, but we also need to recognize that many of these efforts struggled, even prior to COVID. At the same time, the stabilization efforts that helped us on improving good governance, improving economic livelihoods, trying to generate economic livelihoods will also be affected.

At the time when the first year of COVID pushed some 150 million people into extreme poverty, and often did so in ways, in which those that have lost their status in lower-middle class, that have been pushed back into extreme poverty, did so in ways that required them to liquidate all of their human capital development assets. That means -- they may no longer be able to recover their status, even when the economies of the countries start growing, and they may languish in the context of lack of legal employment, often pushed into illicit economies, and thus the hands of nonstate armed actors, for perhaps even a generation.

This, too, strengthens nonstate armed actors by giving them political capital and by strengthening their grip on local populations that are governed, and this is not simply a phenomenon of weak countries. We see the impact of COVID strengthening nonstate armed actors, even in the United States. Right-wing armed groups in the U.S. very actively capitalize on COVID, as did right-wing armed groups in Europe.

However, amidst this overall difficult and -- picture, there is one bright spot that has recently emerged, and that bright spot is Libya, a country that, 10 years ago, experienced a revolution

that deposed the Muammar Gaddafi Regime, and what, after the past decade, then was a seemingly intractable tangle of divided political class, a multitude of fluid militias, both internal and external, and complexities and rivalry of regional powers, since October, now seems to be experiencing a great window of opportunity to achieve significant improvements, and this window of opportunity has only be strengthened in February. To a large extent, this window of opportunity has risen as a result of a joined persistent, dedicated, and innovative facilitation, international mediation and facilitation, by the international community.

There is no better person to start us in the conversation about fragility, stabilization effort, and nonstate armed actors than Ms. Stephanie Williams, who has been one of the key architects of international mediation efforts in Libya. Until a few days ago, Ms. Williams served as the acting special representative of the U.N. secretary general in Libya, having previously served as the U.N. special deputy representative for political affairs. Ms. Williams has a distinguished career in the U.S. State Department, with many different deployments and assignments in the Middle East. I will highlight just a few. She was a chargé d'affaires, in the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, in 2018. She also served as deputy chief of mission in the U.S. missions in Iraq, Jordan, and Bahrain. Ms. Williams, I am so thrilled and honored that you can join us today. I'm so impressed. A hearty congratulations on your tremendous work in Libya. Please tell us about the experience and lessons there. The floor is yours.

MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you so much. Thanks so much for this Brookings invitation, and -- and you, Vanda, and I really look forward to the discussion part of this event. So, I -- but I will start on a bit of a contrarian note, as I'd actually like to challenge the use of the word nonstate actor in the Libyan context because really, in my view, what dominates in Libya are quasi-state actors, in the form of hundreds of armed groups, at the national, provincial, and even local level, that are either directly or indirectly supported by state institutions.

And then we get -- the state institutions, themselves, are weakened and divided, as you noted. In the case of the Government of National Accord, the so-called GNA, which was the product of the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement, while it enjoys international recognition, as the U.N. recognized government, it has lacked a domestic legitimacy, and has been, in many ways, unable to extend its writ,

much beyond the Capital. In the case that there's a parallel executive in the East, the interim government, while it was able to garner some domestic legislative recognition, it also lacks significant popular legitimacy.

So, in fact, one can say that all, you know, current institutions in Libya are bereft of legitimacy, including the two legislative bodies, which are way beyond their shelf life, the last elections, for instance, for the High State Council, occurred in 2012, and the last elections for the House of Representatives took place in 2014. So, fundamentally, we -- the country suffers from a crisis of legitimacy. The quasi-state actors, the armed groups, have morphed, you know, from the days of the Revolution, to really become groups that are able to extract rent from the state, directly, via salaries, and in the case of some powerful armed groups, they're able to enjoy really a straight -- a direct budget line, a dedicated and independent budget, bypassing the ministries, such as the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, or the Ministry of Justice.

These groups then benefit directly from a relationship to the Presidency Council, as is the case of many or most of the prominent Tripoli armed groups. The most recent example of this was President Sarraj's decree in January, just one month ago, and it was a decree that was, essentially, issued unilaterally, by him, to create yet another security agency, under the Presidency Council to be run by Tripoli armed group, a sort of Praetorian Guards -- Guard Unit, of sorts, for the Presidency Council.

And as I noted in my last Security Council Briefing, which was delivered on January 28th, the multiplication of security agencies under the leadership of armed groups with overlapping responsibilities, unclear lines of command and control and financed with public resources further erodes the state security -- the state's security architecture, and it undermines the future security sector reforms and prospects for DDR (disarmament, demobilization, reintegration) of these armed groups, and so, there were other armed groups while still extracting salaries from the state, and here I'll just say, you know, 60% of the -- of the national budget, of the public budget, is devoted to public salaries. That gives you a sense of, you know, and this is, you know, a rentier economy, so, so, perhaps, in some ways, not surprising.

But these other armed groups, while they extract the salaries from the state, essentially

function as criminal enterprises, trafficking and human beings fuel and weapons. Some -- in fact, some of these quasi-state actors run official and unofficial prisons and official and unofficial migrant detention centers, which they use for profit. In some instances, these very armed groups, who have attacked each other at the cost of innocent lives and property, have been paid by different state entities. So, we saw that was the case in the August-September 2018 attack on Tripoli, when group from Misrata and Tarhuna were countered by state financed armed groups who were defending the Capital from Tripoli.

The most infamous example, of course, was General Haftar's attack on Tripoli, which can, in some ways, be described as a state funded Civil War, in that many of Haftar's soldiers continued to receive salaries from the Tripoli government they were seeking to overthrow. So, predation is not merely confined to the quasi-state actors. There's certainly -- and armed groups have been predatory, but I have to say its also practiced, predation is also practiced by the full-time state actors.

So, the situ -- in my mind, the situation Libya bring -- brings to mind, the Saint Augustine parable of the pirate's encounter with the Emperor, where Saint Augustine tells the story of a pirate captured by Alexander the Great. How dare you molest the sea, asked Alexander. Well, how dare you molest the whole world, the pirate replied. Because I do it with the little ship only, I am called a thief. You do it with a great Navy, and you are called an Emperor. In the case of Libya, you could argue that there's little to no distinction between the pirate and the Emperor.

The armed groups have predated on the state which has, in turn, predated on the entire population, using state institutions and state owned companies to fuel and sustain large-scale patronage networks, and we have occasionally, you know, labeled the state actors who engage in predation as the Krabats and militias, these are the militia in business suits. Just one example of the patronage network is the use of Embassies and Consulates'. So, Libya has more overseas diplomatic missions than the United States. And it -- they use these diplomatic missions to feather the nest -- feather nest by embedding in these missions, numerous sort of loyal functionaries in the guise of things, like the health attachés, education attachés, defense -- or security attachés, and, you know, I spoke to the Former Education Minister, for instance, and he tried to really tackle the abuse and corruption in the health attaché, sorry, the education attaché network, but he sort of left in frustration because trying to, you know,

sort of enact reform within the system created too many enemies.

So, what we have seen in Libya is state actors, from many years -- for many years, have profited from the privileged access to the official exchange rates. This has -- the good thing is this has been curtailed with the long awaited unification of the exchange rate, last month, but the fact is the concentration of the country's sovereign institutions, namely the Central Bank of Libya and the National Oil Corporate -- Oil Corporation, not to mention the financial and economics institutions of the state, in Tripoli and the Capital, itself, has made the Capital an attractive target for domestic armed groups because it's where the money is.

And the domestic Libyan patronage and armed group networks are sustained and supported by international networks and nation states who see Libya as a geostrategic prize, ripe for the taking, given its abundant natural resources and a field upon which they and have, literally, waged war over their ideological differences. These internationals have injected their own nonstate or state supported actors on to the Libyan arena, in the form of over 20,000 mercenaries, who are on the ground, now, many of whom either fully or partially occupy at least 10 Libyan military bases. So, into this complex web of the quasi-state actors and the state actors, enters the international mediator, seeking to end this interminable conflict over access to resources and powers -- power, and not to mention the debilitating corruption that plagues Libya.

So, you know for those interested in the details of the mediation process, which did -- much of it did take place in the context of COVID, and we can certainly get into those peculiarities, but if you want to read more about the mediation process and the next steps, I would point everyone to the article I co-authored with Jeff Feltman, that -- which Brookings published yesterday. In short, UNSMIL, the mission in Libya built a three-track intra-Libyan process, focusing particularly on the economic and security drivers of the conflict, while seeking to renew the legitimacy of Libyan institutions through the political track. The progress made through these three U.N. facilitated intra-Libyan tracks remains very fragile. It is a garden, which is going to need a lot of tending, both by the United Nations, itself, and the international community.

One thing in this mediation process that we tried to avoid was the temptation of the

international mediator to pick winners. I don't believe that that has been a successful strategy or -- in Libya or in other conflict areas, historically. What we did, instead, was to broaden the participation, particularly in the economic and political tracks, to include groups that had not been represented in the previous mediation efforts. For the political track, we sought to open it up to the public by using sub tracks and the creative use of the digital dialogue platform that was developed by the U.N. Innovation Unit, in New York. We then broadcast live to the Libyan public much of deliberations, particularly during the last round in Geneva. In fact, according to one Libyan television station, one platform, one -- they registered 1.7 million Libyans viewing and watching the proceedings, according to this channel, and that's if you look at a population of, you know, seven million, that's between one -- one quarter and one third of the population.

So, where are we now? An interim executive has been produced. What the U.S. government needs to do is it should quickly, and it has gotten behind the U.N. process, but it also, you know, now needs to really push the status quo actors, who are loath to commit class suicide, including the parliament, to support the roadmap that was developed by the Libyan political dialogue form, which, really, is now the reference point, the marjieia, for this whole process. The parliament needs to approve the new government, and the legislative bodies need to produce the framework for the elections, which have been established to take place on December 24th of this year, and polling in Libya, since the Geneva meeting has shown strong support for the unification of the executive and even stronger support for the holding of the elections on time. Consistently, polling shows 70% to 80% of Libyans want these elections to take place on time, in December, and they intend to participate in the electoral process.

Once the new government is in place, the U.S. should use its already good development and stabilization programs -- programming to help the government fulfill the discreet tasks ahead of it, and, really, this is an interim executive, it needs to concentrate on very specific tasks. One of them is the electrical grid, which is -- which will collapse, if it's not -- if it's not maintained urgently. There is also a need to, obviously, for the COVID pandemic, to ensure that resources get into the hands of the health authorities, and also into -- resources, in general, get into the hands of the municipalities. The U.S. government should also continue its really excellent support for the High National Elections Commission,

which is going to have its plate full, leading up to the December 24th elections.

The other thing is, you know, the U.S. does -- it does stabilization programming now. Some of that's done through the U.N. Development Program Stabilization Platform, and some of it is done directly, that needs to continue, and here's where, you know, as the situation continues to calm, as, you know, the institutions unite, as you look at more institutional reform, you need to be able to reach those areas, and particularly those cities, in Libya, that have been affected most direly by the conflict, and that's -- that was reflected in the Berlin Conclusions, you know, the conference that was held last year, in Berlin, where there was actually identification of cities in the East, like Derna and Benghazi, who've been afflicted over the past decade, terrible, terrible destruction witnessed in those cities, Murzuk and Sabha, in the South.

You know, Tripoli, of course, the most recent war on Tripoli has devastated particularly Southern Tripoli, so that if the international community, the United States, you know, others -- other donors, working with the United Nations, ensure that those areas get help quickly, in the form of stabilization and then, ultimately, reconstruction assistance. I think that will also go a long way towards, you know, calming the situation in the country.

Look, in the Q&A, I'm happy to get into DDR and security sector reform. There are many, many plans that have been written over the last 10 years. They adorn shelves, you know, of many Embassies of, you know, the mission and in government offices, in Libya, but, you know, conditions just (audio cuts out) a point where (audio cuts out).

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: It appears that Stephanie's line has frozen. Patrick or George or Frances, are you hearing Stephanie?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: You are muted now.

MS. WILLIAMS: Okay, can you hear me?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Great, thank you very much. Your lines froze just at the very

end for a few seconds but thank you so much for the tremendous work in Libya and beyond, and also for those excellent remarks reminding us, right at the beginning, about labels and the fact that seemingly nonstate armed actors might be quasi-state actors, as you labeled it. There is, of course, the larger issue that many nonstate actors govern, often govern, in part, direct ways, far more direct ways than states, and local populations experience their rule far more directly, and sometimes govern, at least in wars, in ways there are no worse than the state governs, particularly when the state engages so heavily in predation, like in Libya, where the state really is not the provider of public goods but rather a mafia bizarre, the purpose of which is to issue exception from rule of law to one's street. Of course, this recognition that the nonstate armed actors might have great legitimacy and great political capital with local populations and the states might be seen as worse than the local alternative is fundamental to devising good stabilization policies.

Patrick, I will turn to you to reflect on this, as you have been one of the key architects of stabilization efforts. Dr. Patrick Quirk is the senior director of the Center for Global Impact and the International Republican Institute, and I'm also delighted to say a wonderful colleague in the Initiative of Nonstate Armed Actors at Brookings, a nonresident fellow in the Foreign Policy Program. He previously served in the U.S. secretary of state's policy planning staff, in the Department of State, and was the lead advisor for Fragile States, Conflict, and Stabilization. He was also one of the key conceptualizers of the new U.S. approach to fragile state, and prior to his work on policy planning, Dr. Quirk served in the State Department of State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, again, as the chief political scientist and lead author of the 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review. And I also very highly recommend Patrick's great book, *Great Powers, Weak States, and Insurgency: Explaining Internal Threat Alliances.* Patrick, over to you.

MR. QUIRK: Thanks so much, Vanda. It's great to be here, and congratulations, again, to Stephanie on the recent breakthrough, I really enjoyed your remarks. I'll do three things in my remarks, first, set the stage by outlining what the Global Fragility Act and associated strategy are, and where nonstate armed actors factor in, second, outline ways that the current U.S. policy might hinder dealing with such actors over the course of strategy implementation, and finally, provide a few

recommendations for us to talk about, for how we could potentially overcome these challenges.

So, let's start with the Global Fragility Act, or the GFA. In December of last year, the U.S. released its first strategies to prevent conflict and promote stability, as called for in the GFA. Implementing this strategy will include selecting priority countries and regions to focus up to $1.1 billion in foreign assistance, over 10 years, on conflict prevention and stabilization. As the U.S. begins implementing this strategy, nonstate armed actors will be one of the main challenges that it faces. From the Northern Triangle to East Africa, wherever the Biden administration decides to focus, it will confront this problem.

So, recognizing this challenge, the new strategy smartly calls for reducing the destabilizing impact of nonstate armed actors as a key objective. However, the document provides very few details on how it will accomplish the same, and that's part of the reason why we're here today, to talk about potential solutions. Before we can do that, I think we need to understand how current U.S. policy might hinder effectively dealing with this problem, in general and in the context of GFA implementation. So, three factors stand out.

First, there's still a dissonance between security operations, development policy, and the counterterrorism laws. U.S. law does limit the policy options for engaging nonstate armed actors designated as terrorist organizations or with links to them, including defectors, as necessarily understandable in principle, but the regulation has hampered some U.S. stabilization efforts, like those in Northern Nigeria.

The second constraint is that the U.S. often prioritizes a state centered approach to engagements. In some cases, the U.S. understandably avoids bypassing the central governments because it buy and ensures foreign assistance, avoids delegitimizing the state, but this capital focus approach can have limitations, it's especially pronounced in cases where the government may, indeed, be predatory and be perpetuating conflict, and, therefore, perhaps a different route to stability could involve working with nonstate armed actors.

The third and final constraint is that the United States doesn't have a policy outlining which nonstate armed actors are acceptable to engage, whether through diplomacy or other support.

Current U.S. stabilization policy defines it as a "political endeavor to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict" but the USG hasn't developed the definition of local legitimacy and metrics for measuring it or other codified criteria to consider, when deciding whether to engage.

Looking ahead to address some of these issues, and, to our discussion today, maximize a fragility strategy's efficacy, the new administration can consider three things, first, developing guidance that defines parameters for engaging nonstate armed actors to include the definition of legitimacy, criteria for considering membership of these organization, past crimes objectives, and whether they align with stability and U.S. interest. This is an incredibly forwarding issue, but it really needs to be addressed.

Second, in crafting country implementation plans for the strategy, the U.S. can outline different scenarios, methods, and plans for engagement with the nonstate armed actors and understand their benefits and consequences. If deemed appropriate, the U.S. can start with lower risk engagement, understand the result, and adapt accordingly. These plans also need to take a hard look at whether the partner government is part of the problem.

Third, and finally, when nonstate armed actors are demobilized and the reintegration period has started, the U.S. can consider providing select groups the resources and skills to govern effectively and engage in political outlets and processes. Even when the U.S. can't directly engage or support such groups, given existing laws and related constraints, it can help partner governments craft the strategies that do include such groups.

In closing, the Biden administration has an opportunity to meaningfully reduce fragility in some of the places that matter most for U.S. interests. Doing so will require certainly making good on the strategy's commitment to addressing the underlying political nature of conflict, as well as reexamining and revamping the U.S. approach to engage nonstate armed actors. I'm really looking forward to thoughts, other thoughts, from Stephanie, Frances, and George, on how we go about doing this. Thanks again, Vanda.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, thank you so much, Patrick. Tremendous. You hit on some of the challenges in dealing with stabilization, both how do we address the legitimacy that local

actors, whether they are government, pro-government or anti-government, in fact, have. And the legal framework that while designs to deprive anti-government terrorists, nonstate armed actors, of material resources, in fact, often critically hampers ability to address their political legitimacy, their local capital. Tough issues that I would pose -- might even suggest, really, a review of whether there should be much offering from designation, such as global terrorist or specially designated crime groups, like the Maras in Central America.

All those issues are issues, Frances, that you grappled with in senior policy decision-making roles. Dr. Frances Brown is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in the Program on Democracy Conflict and Governance. And prior to her appointment, she served both in the Obama and Trump administrations, in the White House, on the National Security Council, at USAID and the Office Transition Initiatives. As well as prior to those important roles, she worked in nongovernmental organizations, very much grappling with issues of a stabilization risk assessment.

I particularly want to highlight Dr. Brown's role on the NSC, where she helped manage the policy processes related to Democrats who support political transition and post conflict stabilization efforts and would suggest here that the issue of post-conflict stabilization has become even more complex because, often, we don't really get to the post-conflict stage. Instead, the conflict goes through multiple mutations, intensification, perhaps decline, but is never quite over, which is yet another issue to grapple with in stabilization, including as it pertains to the Global Fragility Act. Dr. Brown, please.

MS. BROWN: Thank you so much, Vanda. It's really a pleasure to be here with these colleagues. It's exciting to hear the latest from Libya, from Stephanie, and more broadly, beyond Libya, I think it's a really tremendous time to be talking about the agenda for nonstate actors and global conflict. I do think the Biden administration has an incredible opportunity to really make good on the promise of the Global Fragility Act, and it's exciting to be talking about some of the ways that they could do that.

So, now, on the Global Fragility Act, the question does come down to the brass tacks of implementation, and as Patrick notes, I think a key part of that will be really grappling with some key dilemmas on nonstate armed actors. Within my remarks, I just want to illustrate a few of those dilemmas regarding nonstate armed actors, that I think the administration will need to take on board.

So, the three dilemmas I would highlight are, first, that COVID has changed the relationship between nonstate actors and governing authorities in many fragile states around the world, in ways that Vanda alluded to, as well. So, how do we incorporate that into our strategic planning on fragile states? The second dilemma is that we need -- we need to think about how we set policy on nonstate armed actors who are not our adversaries, but instead are our partners in many places around the world, and then third dilemma is how do we set policy on nonstate armed actors who reside in a vast swath of shades of gray, or who may indeed be changing their stripes, in ways that Vanda just mentioned, as well.

So, first dilemma, COVID has really scrambled the respective positions and power dynamics between many nonstate armed actors and governments in many fragile states around the world. The Global Fragility Act talks about the need to bolster legitimate governance to address populations' needs and when we do our own assistance, from the U.S. government and donor side, we often, although not exclusively, work with host governments. We do support civil society in some instances, but our primary relationship, diplomatically and assistance wise, is with the National Capital, was -- is with the governing authority.

COVID has really changed the respective roles of many nonstate groups. In many places, they have stepped into the void, to deliver services that, frankly, the government, the official government is either unwilling or unable to do during COVID. So, just a few illustrations of this, specific to the COVID time period, the group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, HTS, in Syria, has been stepping up its own COVID response. It made a mask factory, it opened isolation centers, been distributing COVID materials. In Iraq, the national government had a pretty underwhelming pandemic response in many places, and that's provided an opportunity for informal militias, called the Popular Mobilization Forces, to respond in their place.

Meanwhile, in Lebanon, Hezbollah has undertaken its own response to COVID, its own -- provide its own services. More recently, in Afghanistan, the Taliban has been backing and facilitating an internationally sponsored vaccine drive. So, these are all ways in which groups are stepping up. Of course, many nonarmed groups are stepping up, as well, but today our focus on -- is on armed groups.

In addition, a lot of nonstate groups are instrumentalizing the pandemic for their own

propaganda purposes, for their own expansion of control. We've seen this in Somalia, with Shabab, who claims that the virus was a crusader origin, as being spread by crusader forces. ISIS and Iraq encouraged an increase in attacks, while Western and government forces were either distracted or retrenched with the pandemic. So, there's a lot of ways in which groups are instrumentalizing this. It's not all bad news, in that regard. There are some places where the pandemic has weakened nonstate actors hands because they haven't been able to respond in the pandemic -- the population judges them accordingly.

So, by some reports in Somalia, Shabab initially denies the existence of the virus or denied how it was being spread, but then it realized that its population -- its popularity had previously waned during famines because it wasn't seen to be responding effectively, so, it then sort of changed course and aimed to respond.

So, in short, the pandemic has scrambled a lot of -- a lot of these dynamics, it's a very mixed picture, globally, but it's just all to say that as we do think about actually crafting fragility strategies for the countries that are selected under the Global Fragility Act, those will need to be really grafted onto a situation where the power dynamics have shifted, and we need to update our analysis and our modes of gathering information to reflect that.

A second dilemma, very quickly, is setting policy on nonstate armed actors who are not our adversaries, who are in fact our partners. So, as Patrick mentions, the Global Fragility Strategy has a really brief mention of nonstate armed actors and it essentially says we will attempt to reduce their influence, but that, obviously, doesn't encompass or apply to the vast swath of nonstate armed actors with whom the U.S. military has partnered over recent years. The U.S. military has rolled out an increasing reliance on working by, with, and through local partners, for reasons that often make sense from a military planning perspective, but these partnerships often have longer term political ramifications and complexities that, as we think about the Global Fragility Act, I think we'll need to grapple with. Syria has one particularly prominent example, that many viewers might be familiar with. This is the U.S. military partnership with the Syrian Democratic Forces, the SDF. This was an incredibly effective military partnership to combat ISIS in the East of the country, and then the SDF has gone on to set up

administration quite quickly in the East of the country, so, very effective from a military criterion perspective, but has raised political complexities.

Our NATO ally, Turkey, views this group as a terror or linked with terrorist groups. There's also been human rights concerns, concerns about the inclusivity of the SDF's governance, although, there are some reports that's improved recently. So, I'm not here to pass judgements on the merits of this partnership, but I do think it's imperative that, going forward, as we grapple with the Global Fragility Act's implementation and think about the long term, these are 10-year plans, we really take, head-on, the complexities of that these by, with, and through relationships have wrought, and I think that this goes well beyond Syria. We're working with local nonstate partners in many fragile states, where we may get involved with the GFA. So, that's another one to grapple with.

Third dilemma, addressing the vast swath of nonstate armed actors who reside somewhere in the shape -- of shades of gray, or who evolve very quickly in their disposition, in their orientation. So, International Crisis Group had a recent piece kind of highlighting this dilemma as regards, again, to Syria, noting this group, HTS, has proclaimed that it's changed its disposition. It's presenting itself as a more pragmatic governing actor, one that doesn't take part in external terrorist organizations that allows aid flows, etc.

I'm not in a position to pass judgement on that particular group or where it is, but I do think there's a broader point to be made about how the U.S. thinks about whether groups or individuals can ever make that evolution from terrorist to reconcilable. Vanda noted the need for offramps, and I think that's something that we will be facing again and again, in many of these fragile states. I would argue that if we are aiming to reorient our foreign policy to rely less on kinetic tools of counterterrorism, like drone strikes, it behooves us all to have clear benchmarks and accountability measures, that we can point to, that say this is sort of how this process happens in our mind. We do have a delisting process, that we can do, but to my mind, we could probably make it more standardize or have more benchmarks that the other side can understand. This may not be feasible in many cases or realistic in many cases, but I think it's something we can all think about that.

Going along with that, I think if we, on the U.S. government side, are really to implement

this kind of shift, we will need better ways of understanding these armed groups, these many -- this swath of armed groups, probably more expeditionary diplomacy, to understand that, and really be able to get the analysis we need. So, that, very briefly, is three dilemmas, none of them easy answers, but I'm really looking forward to the conversation where we grapple a little bit more with the exciting -- the exciting agenda for the Global Fragility Act.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, thank you so much, Frances, great comments, as well, and, you know, I particularly note the issue that it's not just the Irans and Venezuelas and the Russias of the world that are dealing intimately, sponsoring, supporting nonstate armed actors. Of course, this has been a core of U.S. foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy for the past two decades and way before, going to the Cold War Era, whether it was the Mujahidin of the 1980s or the 13, 15, 17th type of militias that we have been supporting in Afghanistan and that are, at best, a loose cannon, often very directly implicated in undermining and in best interest of good governance, even as they promised, at various times, to fight groups, like the Taliban.

And your other point about the stripes, the colors evolving over time, is also fundamental. Many of the so-called nonstate partners might be a partner at time X, but at times X+2, they might have quite easily adopted very divergent agendas and possibly even quite -- agendas that directly contradict our objectives. But it's no way easier with the states, either.

George, if I can turn to you, a core issue, why the challenge of stabilization has been so acute is, of course, that the state partners often are as problematic, interactable, have divergent parochial agenda, as the nonstate armed actors. So, I look to Dr. George Ingram, my colleague at Brookings, senior fellow in the Center for Sustainable Development in the Program on Global Economy and Development at Brookings, to reflect on dealing with states and strengthening state partner capacity. Dr. Ingram's professional career has focused on these issues, across a variety of agencies in the U.S. Congress in the executive branch, as well as in the nonprofit sector. He's served as -- he still serves as chair emeritus of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition and a co-chair of Modernizing Foreign Assistance.

From '98 to 2000, Dr. Ingram was the principal deputy assistant administrator of the Agency for International Development, USAID, with his responsibility being on -- focusing on state

assistance programs in the sovereign area, in place where many states have experienced significant lockdown on state capacities that need to rebuild institution, even as institution would be provided by mafia type actors. And from ’73 to ’95, Dr. Ingram was a senior staff member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. He had very many other distinguished appointments. Dr. Ingram, thank you for your thoughts on how to deal with the states.

MR. INGRAM: Thank you, Vanda, and nice to be with my colleagues today on this panel. I’m going to broaden the conversation beyond just nonstate armed actors to all nonstate actors, and state actors, too, and how the donors deal with them. And I’m going to make two basic points. One is that the donors must have an overall frame of coherence and adaptability, for assistance to be effective. And, two, that the way the deal with nonstate actors has to be one of listening to help them build trust. On the donor frame, there are five issues I will raise.

One, and Patrick touched on this, when he talked about the dissonance within the U.S. government, there must be coherence and consistency across government activities, and this applies in two areas. It applies within the U.S. government, and among the donors, and with the host government. Within the U.S. government, the new strategy on preventing conflict and promoting stability, like the Global Fragility Act and the U.S. IP Report on Fragility, calls for cross agency strategy and operational framework, but outlines, in only very broad terms, agency roles and responsibilities.

The success I’ve seen in other initiatives is based on two key factors. One is strong White House backing. Frances can speak to this, possibly, given her background at the NSC. And secondly, operational control placed in the hands of the agency, principally responsible for funding and operations. With other donors, there needs to be a donor platform for ensuring coordination and consistency among donors and with local stakeholders, both the host government and other key actors in the country. It can involve pool funding, but at a minimum, there needs to be a common frame, a common strategy, that donors are working from, in coordination and compatibility across all activities, both with the host government, and with the private sector, and the nonstate actors.

Secondly, a key element of this is local ownership, engaging the local stakeholders, the government, business, civil society, community groups and leaders, to set the right priorities and in

designing and implementing the programs. Third, implementation decisions must be made in the country. The field must be empowered with the authority to make decisions and adjust programming. This comes together with the issue of adaptability, to make these two prior elements of local ownership and empowering the field to make decisions requires flexibility and adaptability, placing funding for fragile countries in a flexible account, with no programmatic earmarks, and with notwithstanding authority, as was provided in the Freedom Support Act for the transition in the form of Soviet Union, and is now provided in the Complex Crisis Fund, in the Global Fragility Act.

The hard part of this is in this era of intense partisanship, and years of distrust, between the Congress and the Executive Branch, is how to develop trust from the Congress, how to get the Congress to trust that the authority to empower decision making in the field, with the ability to adapt activities, according to the changing dynamics, will be used responsibly. This can be approached through maintaining a close consultative relationship with the Hill, through providing committees of jurisdiction with full access to data and consultations with on planning and policy program deliberations, and possibly embedding a member of the Field Implementation Team, with congressional committee staff. As an aside, I will confess, that this is a need that I have been grappling with for some years, and I would like those listening today, who have creative thoughts on this, to share them with us.

The fifth area, in this arena, is to account for the political. Technical solutions must account and incorporate local political dynamics. Assist programs tend to be designed according to technical requirements, without adequate attention to local, political dynamics. So, the second area of how to engage, with -- at the local level, the basic point is the need to build trust. To listen and to engage in local ownership. What is the common ingredient in fragility? It is lack of trust in local leaders in government. How is trust built? It's built through government meeting the concerns and needs of the populous, through services that meet their needs.

What does this require? It requires listening. It requires listening at the local level. Ritu Sharma, ten years ago, taught us, you can teach a woman to fish, that the poor, that the forgotten, have solutions to their problems. What they need is a little help, and a little empowerment. The new biography, "The Good American," about Bob Gerasene's international work, is instructive in what can be

learned, by going to the community level, by listening to what the problems and concerns are, and tease out the solutions.

I learned this, when I was at AID, in the late '90s, overseeing assistance to the former Soviet Union. AID engaged the Aga Khan Foundation, to figure out how to advance girls' education in Muslim communities in Central Asia. This was Muslims talking to Muslims. At the start of the effort, the implementation staff did nothing for several weeks, several months, and I emphasize the fact that they did nothing but visit the communities and talk to local leaders and citizens about the values of girls' education, about their own interests, about their concerns, and to find out where the opening might be.

They found that opening, and they successfully got those communities to bring girls into schools. The motto here is to listen, to listen, and keep listening, and engage local actors, engaging their priorities in designing the solutions to their problems because they have the solutions. Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Excellent, George. Very powerful comments, as well, particularly highlighting the need to listen to local communities, and to allow and foster local solutions, the local coping mechanisms, the populations develop in dealing with nonstate armed actors, that is often challenging for U.S. policy and international assistance efforts, because it might involve more challenging nonstate armed actors, that we do not like, and rather living with them, and under them, in conditions, that are suboptimal, perhaps, but nonetheless better than alternatives.

Also, your focus on escaping the pressure of burn rates, having to execute programs very rapidly, having to spend money very rapidly, so as not to lose money for the next funding cycle, is a fundamental, and finally, the issue that all transitions or stabilizations are about politics, and fundamentally about changing political balances of power, hence, extremely uncomfortable to those who are losing in the process of power, whether they are parochial governing entities, state or nonstate, or other coalitions. I will now move to the questions and answer period, moderated with our keynote speaker, Ms. Williams, as well as the entire panel, and take questions from the audience. They have been submitted in writing before, they continue to be submitted through Twitter and other means. Stephanie, if can start with you, with one question, that has just come in, that I think is very pertinent, particularly to you.

You spoke about the big innovation of the digital outreach, and digital means of bringing in transparency to the liberation, that allow the vast segments of the Libyan population, now, to observe what's happening, but also put pressure then on their presumed representative. So, the question that has come in is, what are other U.N. efforts, programs, thinking, on bringing more of these digital tools, to other settings, and also, is there any thinking, planning in the U.N. about using artificial intelligence for peacekeeping or stabilization efforts?

MS. WILLIAMS: Thanks very much. So, yes, I mean, I think, and this gets back to, you know, the complexities of doing mediation in the context of COVID. So, you know, we couldn't have physical meetings, and, therefore, we had to move both -- we were on Zoom, you know the Libyan participants, and the three tracks, as well as in -- with the international community with the countries who participate in the Berlin Track, and the working groups there.

But as we were moving, you know, towards the physical meeting, particularly the political track, the Libyan Political Dialogue Form, it coincided with this effort that was being undertaken by the innovation unit, at U.N. headquarters, in New York, which was to launch these digital dialogs. They did in a couple of missions, I'm familiar with the work in the Libya mission, and then I understand they did it in Yemen, as well.

SO, Libya is a Facebook country. It's not -- it's not a Twitter country. It's a Facebook country, that's -- a lot of Libyans spend an enormous amount of time on Facebook, but it is also a country in which there is a lot of interest in engaging, online, and so, we started these digital dialogues, like, in late October, and they ran, really, through January 31st, was the last one, right before the meeting in Geneva, and, like, immediately, we were attracting, like, huge numbers of Libyans, so there's a ceiling on how many you can bring into the digital dialog, and we always exceeded the ceiling.

In other words, there were always people who were, you know, wait -- in the waiting room. And I don't know the technicalities of all that, maybe be that's something that can be improved on, so you can get even participants. But suffice it to say, like, in each of the dialogues, digital dialogues we had a thousand, at least a thousand Libyans, active online, most of them, by the way, you know, younger Libyans, so, really up to the age of about 40, you saw, you know, quite a lot of participation, more

weighted toward men the women, but the participation rate of women, improved, you know, with each -- each dialogue that was conducted.

And I participated directly in four of the dialogues, and it was just a really good way to take the polls, run instant polling, but also in the case of the Libyan Political Dialogue Form to really feed directly, you know, to the participants in the dialogue, for, you know, feedback from, from the Libyan Public. And we complimented that with the sub-tracks that we ran during the dialog as well, where we had rapid tours from women, youth, I mean, municipalities sub-tracks reporting to the dialogue form members. You know, their vision for the way forward.

So, what I did, specifically, before the Geneva dialog, was I solicited questions for the presentations of the -- we had 45 candidates who participated in a presentation and a question/answer session that was -- that was live streamed, into Libya, initially through U.N. WebTV, but then picked up by the Libyan, you know, television stations, and so we were able -- these were not questions that were posed by the United Nations, these were questions that were posed by the Libyans themselves, and so, I think, that also, you know, gave it a much higher degree of legitimacy.

In terms of planning on AI, I would have to defer -- I've now left the United Nations, so I can't really speak for what the United Nations is doing, currently, and I'd have to defer to the brilliant people in New York, who set up the digital dialog platform. Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thanks, perhaps that's a topic that our Brookings Initiative on Artificial Intelligence can tackle. The Initiative looks at a whole variety of issues, of its impact on middle-class, of its impact on democratic processes, authoritarian processes, crime, not simply how to tackle crime, but how anti-crime tools provide backdoors for all kinds of other social impact. So, the international stabilizing -- stabilization peacekeeping dimension, perhaps another element, that we can be exploring, over time.

Frances, let me turn to you with a question that has come in different -- from different people, that has been submitted multiple times, and that's also a primary question on my mind. When we think about the Global Fragility Act, the Act is to select, or the tasking is to select primary areas, perhaps five key countries, I would kind of broaden that beyond the Fragility Act, in a new era of new geopolitics,

where we arguably should start thinking about prioritizing what conflicts we engage in, via the United States.

We might also be asking, how do we prioritize areas where we engage in stabilization. What should be the criteria to indicates that a particular country should receive significant amount of significant resources, and should there be some countries where we say, well, you know, we will stay out this country. We are not going to be really investing very strongly, in terms of time, mostly the other resources, diplomatic capital, other forms of engagement. How do we prioritize?

MS. BROWN: Yeah, it's such an important question, and I think your right, Vanda. In this particular era, we can't stabilize everywhere, or go into every fragile state. I think we need to prioritize based on U.S. national interest, vis-à-vis that locale, and U.S. values, and realistic prospect for change, in terms of, you know, host government, commitment, and other factors. So, in terms of how we do that, how do we select five countries, or 10 countries in this process?

I could put on my scholar Ph.D. hat and paint you a way in which we can have a really robust empirically driven process for this. We have indicators for political instability. We have indicators for state collapse. We have lots of indicators for quality of governments. We have ways we can overlay that with U.S. national interests, you know, potential for a country to export a negative externality, like terrorism, like pandemic disease, like migration. There's all ways that we could actually put all these factors together, have our Intel community or analytic community crunch the numbers, and figure out what are the five or ten countries we should be addressing.

However, I will then put on my policymaker hat, having owned this process or a predecessor process of the NSC for a while, and I will tell you that no country selection and implementation will work, if the ambassador in that country is not brought in, if the mission director of the U.S.A. mission is not bought in, if the regional bureaus of that state in particular, are not bought into that country. And this is for understandable reasons, if you imagine you're an ambassador, and country X, and you go to your host government counterpart, and say congratulations, we selected you as the most fragile state, we're going to invest through the next ten years. You can imagine how that a challenging sell.

So, this is for very reasonable reasons, but in reality, I think, for all the good -- good work that's being done on the analytic side of country selection, I think we need to be real that politics, the importance of politics, and political will starts in our own government. So, what I think that means, as a policy recommendation for the U.S. government, thinking about this is -- this is why it's essential that State Department leadership, at the highest level, really signals the importance of the Act, and implementing the Global Fragility Act, over time.

This is important, why we need continued bipartisan congressional support for implementation going forward. There's, obviously, there's been a lot of bipartisan support to get it over the line, but since this a 10-year endeavor, we need to keep up that -- that attention. And we need signaling from the White House, that this is -- this is important. Because that's the way that I think we ensure regional bureaus ambassadors, etc., will be supportive and bought in. I'll leave it there.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thanks, and, you know, perhaps the phrasing that it's not about most fragile one, might help both local U.S. missions, as well as the host government to buy into it, that it's other forms of importance as opposed to the negative one. But I am very glad that you hit the issue of --

MS. BROWN: I'll let the diplomats be more diplomatic than I was just there. I try.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I was very pleased that you mentioned the realistic prospect for change, as being an important criteria, one that I would say, often, is absent from policy, where the tyranny of some costs, tyranny of prior engagements, prior diplomatic and other relationships often trumps the issue of -- that despite more resources being added, the conflict dynamics might not change, and that a wiser, if cold blooded, U.S. foreign policy might in fact dictate this engagement, or at least this engagement in some form.

And I'm also glad that you brought in the issue of terrorism, the potential spillovers of negative externalities, as terrorism being one. Of course, that's been a key principle, a key organizing principle, of U.S. foreign policy since 9/11, in the same way the opposing the Soviet Union was during Cold War. But the impact on the lives and wellbeing of U.S. people is far more dramatically impacted by COVID. Almost 500,000 American, so far, have died of COVID. Just the latest static that the first half of

year of COVID, diminished U.S. life expectancy by one-year, extraordinary number disproportionately born by minorities, such as Black Americans.

Yet, what is the U.S. death rate as a result of terrorism, at least in homeland, we're talking about low thousands in the 20 years, but it's given such a priority focus, as opposed to, for example, the devoting resources to preventing habitual destruction in tropical areas, as way to mitigate zoonosis - the emergence of -- of vital diseases jumping from -- from animals to people.

So, the cold-blooded National Security Assessment would say far greater impact on wellbeing, material, physical, that is survival of mitigating habitat destruction, as opposed to terrorism, yet very different in practice operationalization, or at least up to now, but a different operationalization, we'll see what the Biden administration does.

The other complicating factor of pursuing the stabilization agenda, Patrick, is that we are no longer the only actor in the stabilization agenda. We now have countries, such as Russia and China, offering their assistance to countries that feel weak. Russia, in particular, has built wide set of relations with countries in Africa, offering the support of private security companies, embedding Russian advisors, often getting full political and diplomatic resources, but also economic access as a result.

And China has a vastly expanded its engagement with countries in Africa, Latin America, from promoting platforms, such as safe cities, the anti-crime digital artificial intelligence system, to combat crime. So, in the view of governance, the view of governance of Russia and China, and for that matter other actors, like the United Arab Emirates, is often very different than ours.

What is good governance might look very radically different to how U.S. policy has defined good governance. How do we deal with this competition in promoting good governance? How does that intersect with U.S. stabilization effort and the implications for the Global Fragility Act?

MR. QUIRK: Yeah, thanks, Vanda, great question. There are two parts to that response. One looks at broader U.S. engagement, vis-a-via democracy assistance, foreign policy, and the second, links more directly to the discussion today, on conflict prevention and stabilization. So, starting with the former, I think, the U.S. can continue to work with partner countries to help inoculate their political systems from interference by the Chinese Communist Party and the Kremlin. China and Russia are both

undermining democratic institutions and empowering liberal actors across the world.

Chinese government-linked companies are exploding and exacerbating governance gaps in vulnerable countries, using a mix of corruption and lack of the transparency that conclude deals that benefit elite private interests, while under minding political accountability. Russia is doing much of the same, using strategic corruption to prop up and co-opt allies within countries and undermine democratic actors with ties to the U.S. and E.U. We could go on and on.

In terms of what to do about it, I think, currently you see the White House is already sharply calling out Beijing and Moscow, for their meddling abroad, and oppression at home, as this is good. It should urge allies to do more of the same - explicitly recognize preempt and punish the threat to democracy from the CTC and the Kremlin, and this should be an agenda item for every call Secretary of State Blinken has with bilateral counterparts that are facing these threats.

To galvanize additional pressure, though, the U.S. can push NATO, in alliance centered on protecting the principals of democracy, you know, after all, to recognize China threat of democracy in its strategic doctrine to call up interference and to levy consequences for those actions. Linking Chinese and Russian action activity in comprehensive stabilization to today's discussion, you're right, the stabilization has very much become another arena for competition with our rivals.

This is something that Frances and her colleague, Daphne McCurdie, nicely outlined in a recent paper, and something Jason Fritz and I explored in an article for Brookings, last year, where we termed this, contested stabilization. Related to GFA implementation, certainly a competition with China and Russia, and even Iran, should be asset of country level plan. But I would caution against being to alarmist, you know, I think the analysis of the impact of engagement by these actors needs to be evidenced based, and certainly depending on where we select, the plan sure articulates this specific ways in which these different adversaries exacerbate fragility and contributes to violence and prescribe evidence-based solutions for each country's activity. It's a really great question and it's a very important topic.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Indeed, we'll be -- and how do we deal with engagement of China and Russia. That will be one of the dominant factors of what the Biden administration, will need to

think about. I would also emphasize, or one aspect of your response Patrick, we should not be too alarmist, and we should argue avoid the track of the Cold War, of feeling that we to inject programs, any and every time Russia and China are there, that we, so, a factor as a result needs to be engaging, and particularly need to be engaging in support of the rival to the actors, that Russia and China embrace.

George, one question, has come in, that asks about the role of broader civil society and exactly connects with your remarks about listening to local communities, listening to local civil society and specifically the questions asks, how can that be amplified, in U.S. foreign policy to combat corruption, and to combat the problematic predatory practices by state, something that's been at the core U.S. foreign policy and international engagement for a long time, and I very much welcome your thoughts. How can we better strengthen and engage civil society for the purpose of using state corruption?

MR. INGRAM: I think we can do it through several ways. One way we can do it is through the host government, and I use the example of what AID and the Eurasia Foundation are doing in the Ukraine, in which they are helping the government move government services online to a digital platform. They are creating the ability for e-procurement, and the government of Ukraine claims that, over the last seven years, that has saved, I think it's $5 billion, and has removed from the procurement process, and from the process of issuing licenses for business, in the tax area, it's removed that middle-man paperwork, where the corruption is, and it is done in a public transparent fashion, so that the public knows, and along with that is a public forum, where the public can respond, can complain. So, this combination of putting the government services online, and having a digital platform, where the citizens can engage and report on how that's working, has made a big difference in Ukraine.

I think, secondly, the U.S. government can train and help give civil society groups the capacity to advocate with government. The capacity to mobilize public opinion. To train civil society groups, how to analysis government policies and how to engage with government and how to report on how the government is providing services and meeting the needs of government. So, building up the capacity of civil society organizations has demonstrated, in various countries, the ability to chip away at corruption.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thanks. Now, the question of corruption is, of course, so

fundamental to Libya, as well, and to sustaining the process that Libya has -- has been going through, Stephanie, and also the complexity of the external actors, the Russia in particularly, various of the Middle Eastern countries, Egypt, as well as European countries being so thickly involved, in the Libya context, is another complexity with the Libyan actors, asking for the departure of all foreign forces, private security companies, militias, something that might not happen. Can you reflect with us on these -- can you help us reflect about these two issues? Corruption in the Libyan context on how to mitigate it, such as to get to, but the electricity delivery, and then, of course, the external actors, that are so heavily impinging on domestic dynamics, internal dynamics in Libya?

MS. WILLIAMS: Okay, so, one of the things that we did, in the mission, of when Hassan Salam recruited me, as his deputy for political affairs, he asked, and he had recognized early on, in his tenor, sort of the political economy of the Libya file and, the need to focus really on, you know, economic issues, the underlying drivers of the conflict, which is essentially a conflict over resources and power.

So, how do you get to this? You start process of economic reform. You start a process -- well eventually, which will lead to, you know, unifications of critical institutions, sovereign institutions, like the Central Bank of Libya. You -- we work for instance on, and it's underway now, took two years to accomplish, but we now have International Audit, being conducted of the Central Bank. The main branch in Tripoli, and the parallel branch in the East, all of this, you know, to really increase transparency, on how the people's money, and when this is a country, you know, the majority of the public budget is derived from oil sales, and oil revenues.

Increased transparency, but also increased, you know, in accountability and improve, you know, how the systems of, you know, how this is being spent. But also to -- reduce the ability of the quasi-state actors, you know, to extract rent, you know, and this gets into really what needs to happen, in terms of DDR, in terms of disentangling the quasi-state actor form the government institutions.

So, I'll give you one example, the prisons. So the major prisons in Tripoli, are run by quasi-state actors. They're not run by, really by the ministry objective. They are run by armed groups. Armed groups use, you know, the prisons to, for instance, extort, you know, money from the families of prisoners. Like for instance, you know, if they need medication, you know, they have to pay. Who gets

that money? The money goes to -- mostly to the armed group.

So, DDR will help to disentangle the relationship, and to return, you know, a management of things, like the prisons to the proper institutions. Economic reform, you know, will reduce the opportunity for armed groups, but also predatory, you know predatory state actors to abuse the current, you know, disfunction division and lack of transparency and accountability, and there is a lot of work to be done on that file at large, but, you know, corruption is just a huge, huge problem, in Libya, and it under minds any confidence in the ability of the state to be able to deliver, particularly at the local level.

In terms of the departure of mercenaries, which was called for, in the October 23rd Cease Fire Agreement, that was signed by the, so-called Five Plus Five Joint Military Commission. They did set themselves a very ambitious deadline of 90 days, of course, that 90 day deadline came and went on January 23rd, but that, you know, they are still quite determined, the Five plus Five, just held their seventh round of negotiations, in the city of Sirte, where their headquarters is located. They address the international community through the Berlin Process Security Working Group.

I attended that meeting, before I departed the mission, and again, they reiterated that they would like to see -- they reiterated their demand that these forces have to depart the country. So, the fact that the deadline is passed, you know, does not make it any less legitimate, or more binding, on these countries. Companies, whoever it is, that's bringing, you know, these guys into Libya, needs to take them out.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Excellent, thank you very much. George, I have one question specifically directed to you, that I would like to raise. I think it's very valuable for all kinds of stabilization efforts, beyond the GFA, namely that OTI had many authorities and flexibilities with respect to on-the-spot decisions, in the field, that is the office of Transition Initiatives within USAID. It was unbound, liberated, from the earmarked restrictions that other agencies often have to deal with. What are the biggest up cycles to expanding the authorities and flexibilities that OTI, has been able to enjoy, to other agencies and bureaus?

MR. INGRAM: You know, I wish I knew the answer to that question, because I've been working on it for 20 years. But the Congress is given flexible authorities, where it's gotten excited. Where

there's been a big change, the Seed Act, to help Eastern Europe, the Freedom Support Act, of its former Soviet Union. The MCC, the PEPFAR, those programs don't have year marks, and they have -- the first two have not withstanding authority.

So, first and foremost, you got to get the Congress interested. The Congress got halfway there with the Fragility Act. They, in there, embedded in there, is sort of the concept that we should get away from earmarks, and directives. So, the Congress is sort of, half pregnant on the Fragility Aspect, and I think what we need to do, is take them up on that. The administration needs to push the pilot countries, and it needs to double down with the Congress, in saying, "Okay, let's go further in the direction your saying, and let's not have any directives from Washington on these programs. We're going to be totally transparent with you. Give us three years, give us five years, to demonstrate this works."

Beyond that, it's you know, one of the problems is that we have so many domestic interest groups, that for good reasons, want an earmark, for health or education, or democracy, in the Foreign Assistance Act, in the appropriations, and we haven't convinced them to look at the broader prospective of it take, but what development takes. If the development takes all the above and more, and needs to be fine-tuned, to a particular country.

So, I think better educating the developed community, on the importance of a comprehensive development, is the second element I would put out there.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much. We are five minutes to closing, and I wish we were an hour away from closing because there are so many rich issues, dimensions and many questions still coming in. But I will sadly have to do, instead, is to turn back to all of you, and give everyone a chance to make any closing remarks. Join in any part of the conversation, as has been a raised, maybe Frances, I can start with you, in this round, any remarks you would like to make about the issue we just discussed, OTI authority civil society, please.

MS. BROWN: Yeah, of course.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: And, if you can do it in a minute that would be great.

MS. BROWN: Quickly, on civil society support, agree with George's points. I would just add that, the Obama administration made a lot of efforts on improving civil society support. We then had

four years of the Trump administration, which took a different approach. It would be a shame if we didn't harvest the lessons from the Obama administration's stand with civil society and elsewhere. There's a lot of goodness to be learned there, while recognizing the world has changed for civil society actors, they been stepping up during COVID. There's also greater pretext for authoritarians to crack down on them. But we're not starting from a blank state, and civil society, so let's learn some of those lessons.

Quickly on OTI, and flexibility, this relates to civil society. We always hear this demand for greater flexibility in funding. I think, we all agree that important. The question is how, OTI has cracked that puzzle, by a flexible procurement mechanism, called Grants Under Contracts. It is not that it usually uses, it's notwithstanding authority. That's actually the minority of the cases. It's a procurement mechanism, and without getting into the non-glamourous details on that. I will just say that procurement mechanisms can be taken up by other parts of the U.S. government, so there's learning, maybe there already is some learning in other parts of the government. So, I do think it's important to learn those lessons on flexible mechanisms. I will leave it there.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Wonderful, very important, and I love every time someone says lets learned from what has worked and has not worked, very important advice to us. Patrick, your closing, thoughts, and any comments you would like to make, in a minute?

MR. QUIRK: Yes, there are a couple of quick thoughts on the path forward for the GFA. I mean, two keys problems stand out for me. One that the U.S. government, truly embraces a whole of government approach. We've talked a lot today, about the importance of foreign assistance, which is key. But conflict at its core, as we all agree, is a political problem. Therefore, there needs to be really strong leadership role for the Department of State, in using diplomacy to resolve these issues, and that links to my second and final point is, we can have the most pristine implementation plans, but if the leaderships, in buying for the GFA, is not at the highest levels. I don't see this going very far.

Therefore, I think with who the Biden administration to rescind this September of last year, executive order, elevate back the leadership of the GFA to the White House, as well as, name someone at the State Department, ideally at the undersecretary level, as the lead for this. You know getting away from the assistance at the assistant secretary level. I'll leave it there, thanks again, Vanda.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Great, George please, your thoughts.

MR. INGRAM: Three quick points on what's been said. Appreciate what Frances said, on mining the experience of the Obama administration, with civil society.

Two, Vanda, you hit a really critical point on one of the problems, is the need to spend money rapidly. We have to get away from that, in fragile environments, and we need start off spending money slowly, with maybe a big incentive pot out there for when the politics and the capabilities are right. And, back to Frances, your point on what do we do if we don't have -- if the ambassador or U.S.A. mission director don't agree with the approach. We change the personal.

We out the -- right? We put the ambassador and an AID director in those countries that have the right experience, have the ability to analyze properly, whether or not this fragile environment is right for our engagement or not. It always comes down to have the right people, in the right place.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: And there could not have been a better person in Libya, the best person for the place, then Stephanie Williams. Stephanie, you concluding thoughts, please?

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, thanks, Vanda. You know, it was a whole -- as you talk about a whole of government approach, it was a whole of mission approach, in terms of what we accomplished in Libya, and I have to -- here, also the terrific work of the U.N. humanitarian agencies, on the ground, particularly the World Health Organizations, which is an operating and very difficult circumstances in Libya, during the pandemic.

Not, you know, at the risk of not, you know, repeating what has already been said, I'm very, also supportive of the idea of knitting civil society closely into this tangled web, in Libya, of how to -- how to really move forward on DDR. We tried to do that in the fall of 2018, after that particular battle, for Tripoli, and we were not entirely successful, but what I saw, in the course, particularly of the political dialog, was the really critical role that civil society can play, as well as women's organization.

Now the other thing that -- so I do think, Libya should be somehow woven into the GFA, should be a priority country, and it should be, I agree elevated, to the top of the hierarchy, the bureaucracy in Washington, at the White House level. But we can't forget that in a country like Libya, which is now just, yesterday, marked the tenth anniversary of the up-rising against Ghadaffy, that

processes -- peace processes need to be, you know, undergirded, supported, almost put on the foundation of, you know, adherence to human right principles.

Accountability and transitional justice, which will ultimately lead to the National Reconciliation, which Libyans now, I believe, are ready for, but we can't skip over, you know, these -- the need for this to all be rooted in those principles, because there is a horrible lack of accountability, in Libya, and I believe that that needs to be reflected in U.S. foreign policy, as well, I was pleased to see that the U.S. government, in the later days of the Trump administration, did sanction the Kaniyat Militia, who had committed horrible crimes for many, many years, in Tarhuna, and I hope that other countries take similar steps. Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, thank you, very much to all of you, for just absolutely terrific conversation. I learned so much, I am receiving many comments, from our audience about how much they appreciated an absolutely stellar panel, with terrific remarks by Ms. Stephanie William, Dr. George Ingram, Dr. Patrick Quirk, and Dr. Frances Brown.

Now throughout the whole hour and a half, I had been thinking about how -- what the stabilization efforts and lessons of opportunities, dealing with civil society, demanding accountability, abroad, mean for our own country, for the United States. Where the issue of right-wing armed actors – right-wing Militias arriving, armed groups, in my view poses far greater threat to democracy and the rule of law in the country, that any organized crime group, and Mexican cartel, can and arguably a foreign based terrorist-based organization can.

And so many of the dimensions, how do we DDR them? Do we designate them as terrorist groups? What -- how do we engage with communities? How do we sever the links,that many of these groups have cultivated, with politicians, with sheriffs? How they permeate institutions, such as U.S. police departments or the military, are now closer to home, than at any time that we have seen in many decades, and that's something that's -- I am, in terms of working on, as part of the Initiative of Nonstate Armed Actors, other colleagues at Brookings, and so, I hope that maybe, some months down the road, we can reconvene and think about the lessons from abroad for our own country. Till then, enormous thanks to all of you. Enormous thanks to our audience for their rich questions, the many questions, and I

look forward to another opportunity to engage.

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