

TESTIMONY FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY WITKOWSKY
“IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL FRAGILITY ACT OF 2019” HEARING OF THE
HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE,
SUB-COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS, AND GLOBAL CORPORATE SOCIAL IMPACT
May 11, 2022

Chairwoman Jacobs, Ranking Member Malliotakis, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me and my colleagues to testify today about the Global Fragility Act of 2019. I echo the Secretary’s gratitude to the U.S. Congress for its passage of this landmark, bipartisan legislation and its vision for a fundamental shift in how we work to prevent conflict globally. I also express my appreciation to those in civil society and expert communities who advocated for the Act, and who will help us take implementation forward. With the Global Fragility Act, and the associated U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (the “Strategy”) mandated by the law, we now have an ambitious new framework for engaging with our partners to address the drivers of fragility, prevent violence, and advance stability in conflict-affected areas.

Today the world is grappling with unprecedented instability that crosses borders and cuts across societies, ways of life, and economies. A rising number of countries are experiencing protracted violent conflict. A global pandemic has claimed more than six million lives. A climate crisis threatens the future of every continent. Emboldened autocrats challenge our belief that democracy and multilateralism can deliver in the 21st century. These trends remind us of the importance of preventing or mitigating crises. They also underscore the value of our approach under the Strategy to partner with other nations to prevent conflicts and crises from breaking out or deteriorating further. Our prosperity and security depend upon peaceful, self-reliant, and stable economic and security partners.

The Strategy integrates U.S. diplomacy, development, and security-sector engagement, with the dual goals of strengthening resilience among partner nations and enhancing how our government conducts its efforts to do so. It is a field driven and evidence-based approach designed to take into account and address the underlying causes of violence and instability. This approach incorporates the hard lessons learned during decades of conflict and response around the world. The Strategy also allows us to continue to learn from our work and adapt our approaches against emerging threats or react to new opportunities.

The Strategy’s 10-year time frame is a major innovation and an opportunity that allows for deeper understanding of evolving contexts, longer planning horizons, sustaining new partnerships, and enabling the adaptation that we hope will be at the heart of our efforts. It also signals to partner countries that we are committed to doing the hard work with them over the long term. In challenging operating environments, we often lose sight of prevention opportunities. As President Biden has said, “Prevention is hard work — measured not in days and weeks, but in years and generations. Its successes are never as evident as its failures, and it

requires us to remain focused on lasting peace and stability over the allure of easier, more temporary gains that may not strengthen our position in the long term.”

On April 1, the President initiated the next critical step in translating the ambitious goals of the Global Fragility Act and the Strategy into reality. Following an interagency process of in-depth analysis and extensive consultations with stakeholders and partners, including Congress, experts from across the U.S. government, civil society organizations, and partner countries, President Biden announced that the U.S. government is launching the implementation of the Strategy in four priority countries and one region: Haiti, Libya, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, and the Coastal West Africa sub-region of Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo. We are engaging partner country governments, civil society, and the private sector to begin, in earnest, the collaboration that will underpin development of the 10-year implementation plans.

The Administration has also released a new Prologue to align the Strategy with current and emerging challenges – not only elevating democracy, human rights, and governance but also mitigating the climate crisis and strengthening environmental security; pursuing equity and equality based on gender and other factors; promoting security sector governance; and managing rival powers. The Prologue underscores that we will integrate the Strategy with our policy approaches across these priority areas. It highlights that, through a spirit of partnership, we will build on the strengths of communities, governments, and nations to rebound from shocks, confront negative global trends, and create new paradigms for broader cooperation.

Under the Strategy, we will pursue a whole of government approach to our efforts. The Department of State is the lead for executing the Strategy, establishing United States foreign policy, and advancing diplomatic and political efforts. The Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations leads Strategy coordination efforts within the State Department and across USAID, the Departments of Defense and the Treasury, and other departments and agencies as appropriate. We and our interagency partners are united in our effort to implement the law and the Strategy with strong collaboration across our respective teams. We intend to bring a broad suite of tools to this endeavor: diplomatic engagement; country specific analysis of factors of instability; foreign assistance, including development and security sector assistance; defense support and security cooperation; and trade, multilateral financing, and private investment. We will align our work with related U.S. government plans and strategies.

We will engage partners inside and outside of government to develop and implement the 10-year country and regional implementation plans. We will work with national governments, as well as local actors to build a joint commitment to our efforts. Outside of government, we look forward to taking an inclusive approach to engaging with civil society, including key women’s and youth groups, as well as the private sector, academia, foundations, and diaspora communities, among other stakeholders, in partner countries as well as in the United States. Partnerships with our allies and friends will also be a key element as we work together, with regional and multilateral organizations, to identify mutual priorities, share analysis, and advance common objectives. We will take a field-driven teamwork approach that seeks participatory, locally-led solutions. Under strategic interagency guidance, our Embassies will lead field-level planning and coordination of

the 10-year implementation plans, across the full spectrum of conflict prevention and stabilization activities in the partner countries.

Even as we are setting out on the next phase of our work to develop the 10-year implementation plans, we will commit to continuing to learn and adapt these plans over time. The implementation plans are not intended to be static, but living documents that incorporate learning, changes in the local contexts, and the new challenges and opportunities that emerge over the 10-year horizon. We will establish a robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning system tailored to each country or region, which is designed to capture changes in the local and external context and inform decision-making. We are also preparing a strategy-level monitoring and evaluation framework that will look across all countries' implementation plans for common indicators, trends, and lessons. This system will provide feedback loops that will inform our learning and the adaptation of our plans. It will help us take stock of progress in implementing the U.S. government reforms needed to make us more effective in these partner countries as well as in U.S. conflict prevention and stabilization efforts globally.

As outlined in the Strategy, the U.S. government has also established a high-level, White House-led interagency Steering Committee that will oversee the Strategy and its implementation, including integration of policy priorities such as Women, Peace, and Security and Atrocity Prevention, and identifying and addressing potential bureaucratic challenges. To support overall GFA implementation and the Steering Committee, we will establish a State-Department led, interagency "secretariat". As we begin this phase of implementation in the partner countries, we will solicit feedback from our teams in the field on what may hinder or enhance effective strategy implementation, to inform how we prioritize and accomplish necessary reforms to our processes.

Our efforts will not be successful without continued broad, bipartisan support for implementation of the Strategy, including foreign assistance resources. We deeply appreciate your support for this initiative and look forward to continuing to work with you. We approach this ambitious undertaking with a sense of opportunity and considerable humility. We welcome your engagement on all aspects of our implementation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to taking your questions and to working with you and your colleagues moving forward.