

STATEMENT OF ROBERT JENKINS, ASSISTANT TO THE ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE BUREAU FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION AND STABILIZATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND GLOBAL CORPORATE SOCIAL IMPACT

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Jacobs, Ranking Member Malliotakis, distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify about the implementation of the Global Fragility Act (GFA), the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, and the initial partner countries and sub-region where the work and efforts will be realized.

Thanks to many of you, and a number of peacebuilding civil society organizations working in and on the front lines of conflict, the Global Fragility Act passed Congress with overwhelming support and was signed into law in December 2019. As mandated by the law, the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability is a roadmap for a 10-year, coordinated, strategic, and field-led effort to strengthen the security, peace, and prosperity of people everywhere.

The Strategy responds to decades of lessons learned on how the U.S. government approaches and resources stabilization and prevention efforts, and it helps us to align our work under the Stabilization Assistance Review, Women Peace and Security, and the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act. The Strategy is a long-term investment in locally-driven global peace and security that will deliver critical returns not only for the nations that we will be working with, but also for the United States and our allies across the globe. Our goal in implementing this Strategy is to support partners' efforts, particularly in volatile parts of the world, to address challenges before they lead to destabilizing conflict and violence. We now have an opportunity to elevate and drive what we've tried to do for a long time: get ahead of crises and work to prevent them with sustained funding and coordinated U.S. government and international partner efforts over a 10-year period.

Working Differently

Back in November at Georgetown University, USAID Administrator Samantha Power laid out her priorities for the Agency. She spoke about localization, listening to and working with people where they live and where they are, with trust and humility. These principles of localization are not new to the peacebuilding community, but they will require the Agency and interagency to change their approach to engagement.

Through the Global Fragility Act, local partners and host governments will have a voice in how we implement the Strategy effectively. We will seek out donors and private-sector partners willing to invest and foster innovations in prevention and focus on bringing in targeted resources from the beginning.

We will work towards fostering durable peace and ensuring that USAID's diverse program toolkit is designed to address conflict across the board. This also means pushing the Agency to cut red tape and move more quickly to respond in conflict and violence settings—or as we like to say, move at the speed of relevance. For example, working with local partners can be a real challenge when USAID procurement processes require the same amount of time to spend \$50,000 as they do to spend \$50 million.

It is not just about the type of programs we undertake, but how we do it. Our work requires a multi-pronged approach. It presents a unique opportunity to define this approach and make it real.

We need to move more quickly towards decisions and give our staff, particularly those in the field, the room to experiment and the ability to take risks. The situation on the ground changes rapidly and we need to be nimble at making changes to our programming. My friend and mentor, Ambassador Rick Barton, when he directed the Office of Transition Initiatives, used to drill into our head that it's better to be 80 percent right at the right time than 100 percent right too late.

We know a lot of this and have been doing it. And in some settings, we are still not fast enough or taking enough risks. Risks in investing locally, in developing new partnerships, in becoming more expeditionary—and risks in pursuing and learning from activities that require adapting our objectives and goals. We must make the idea of course correction part of our DNA to ensure we are doing the right thing at the right time, which may sometimes seem to the outside like it is on the fly—but its deliberate flexibility in our planning and response. Much of what the Global Fragility Act refers to is helping us take on the non-glamorous, “hard considerations” of processes and systems within our organizations which create bottlenecks, staff time, red tape and general frustrations in addressing peacebuilding and prevention.

Prioritizing conflict prevention requires more than simply redirecting existing programs or implementing new programs. It will require us to change how foreign aid links with diplomacy and defense. Ultimately, it provides a cross-cutting blueprint for aligning and applying the various tools of our government, while acknowledging that to achieve success, reforms to our foreign policy and assistance systems are necessary.

To do this, policymakers must focus on prevention and to do this, we must look at what we need next year, not just what we need right now. Everyone says that's a great idea but then

they get right back to today's crisis and then tomorrow's crisis, and so on, and so on. Archbishop Tutu used to like to say you can save someone who's drowning in the river, and then you can save another one. At some point you should go up the river and find out why they are falling in and solve that problem.

The Way Forward

The Global Fragility Act's very purposeful 10-year timeframe balances the need to respond to crises in the short-term with a view towards long-term stability and peace, emphasizing the importance of investing in prevention based on evidence and analysis. USAID will focus our efforts to champion locally-led solutions, fortify regional planning, facilitate the gathering of the right stakeholders and change the way we manage and analyze the problem set.

As USAID aligns its efforts to implement this law, we will need to maintain a longer-term focus in three important ways:

First, is to leverage and help shape the global shift toward addressing fragility and promoting peace and resilience. The Global Fragility Act, the U.N. Peace Agenda, and the World Bank Fragility Strategy all speak to the importance of coordinating multisectoral approaches that integrate conflict prevention and peacebuilding. USAID works to reinforce this global commitment by providing leadership and coordinating with like-minded partners, the private sector, academia, and civil society on ways to innovate and implement assistance toward peace.

Second, we must better integrate conflict prevention and peacebuilding as both a way and a means to achieve other national security goals. Every national security and development challenge—the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, democratic backsliding or fighting corruption—affects how we prevent conflict and build resilience for peace. This is why USAID must incorporate fragility and conflict prevention as key aspects of the Agency's work.

Third, we need to incorporate and embed expertise, resources, and processes into our work. The SIGAR 20-year lessons learned report, released late last year, found that agencies must invest first and foremost in themselves. USAID is committed to elevating and integrating conflict prevention and resilience across our programming. We want to challenge the misconception that you cannot measure prevention and promote flexible and adaptable spending that can iteratively integrate learning. USAID created the Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization (CPS) to lead these efforts, putting the Agency ahead of the curve and helping further integrate and coordinate work on conflict prevention, violence prevention and citizen security, atrocity prevention, stabilization, and women, peace, and security.

The Global Fragility Act acknowledges some of the most persistent criticisms of past U.S. foreign policy—the lack of coherent and adaptable strategy and the inability to have a long-term timeframe to address complex foreign policy challenges. The law rightly recognizes that the U.S. government must incorporate the numerous lessons learned from the last two decades of interventions. And we have learned plenty over the past decade about where we can improve. We have worked to develop and test new approaches to preventing conflict and building resilience. We want to avoid what we know doesn't work and amplify what we know works well. We want to innovate.

Now that we have identified and announced our priority countries and sub-region, our staff in our embassies are partnering with governments and local actors to develop 10-year strategies that will leverage all of the lessons we've learned in places like Iraq and Afghanistan and take into account local expertise. Our call going forward is to strengthen our efforts to work as a true country team, evaluate problems through a local lens, and broaden our aperture into what fuels crisis and conflict before violent instability occurs. With this field-driven process, we will share evidence with our partners to encourage innovation and collaboration with us. Our development assistance will undergird a renewal of preventive diplomacy and security sector assistance, including how we work within the U.S. Government interagency. And the Global Fragility Act mandates that we come back to Congress and tell you what administrative burdens are impeding our ability to achieve our goals, share where the U.S. government is not getting it right, and trumpet our successful interventions and newly proven strategies.

Conclusion

As the President's April 1, 2022 letter stated, "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."

Successful implementation of the Strategy will ultimately be measured by outcomes and impacts on the ground. The letter and spirit of the Global Fragility Act coincide with specific priorities for this Administration and for the world. How we address climate change, COVID, democratic backsliding and corruption will all affect how we prevent conflict and build resilience for peace.

Getting there will require more than simply implementing new programs; we will need deeper institutional changes in Washington and the field. The Global Fragility Act gives us a ten-year period to step back from short-term firefighting and to look at the hard considerations.

We will be more intentional in creating unity of purpose between the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and other U.S. Government departments and agencies. It's not just about programming, it's about preventive diplomacy and learning from what is happening

and making critical changes along the way. We will move forward with humility and in partnership with our local colleagues and communities and with all of you in Congress.

We are grateful to the U.S. Congress for its passage of the bipartisan Global Fragility Act that underpins the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability and demands a fundamental shift in how we work to prevent conflict globally. We are looking forward to working with those in civil society and expert communities who not only advocated for the Act, but will be with us, hand in hand, as we take implementation forward. With this new collective effort, we are ready to execute this ambitious framework with our global partners to anticipate and prevent conflict and promote stability around the globe.