# THE STRATEGIC PREVENTION PROJECT

## ASSESSING THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE IN PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT IN FRAGILE STATES | **2019**

**OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE RESOURCES (F)**
*Strategic, Coordinated, Effective Foreign Assistance on Behalf of the American People*

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This report was produced for the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources. It was prepared by Frontier Design.

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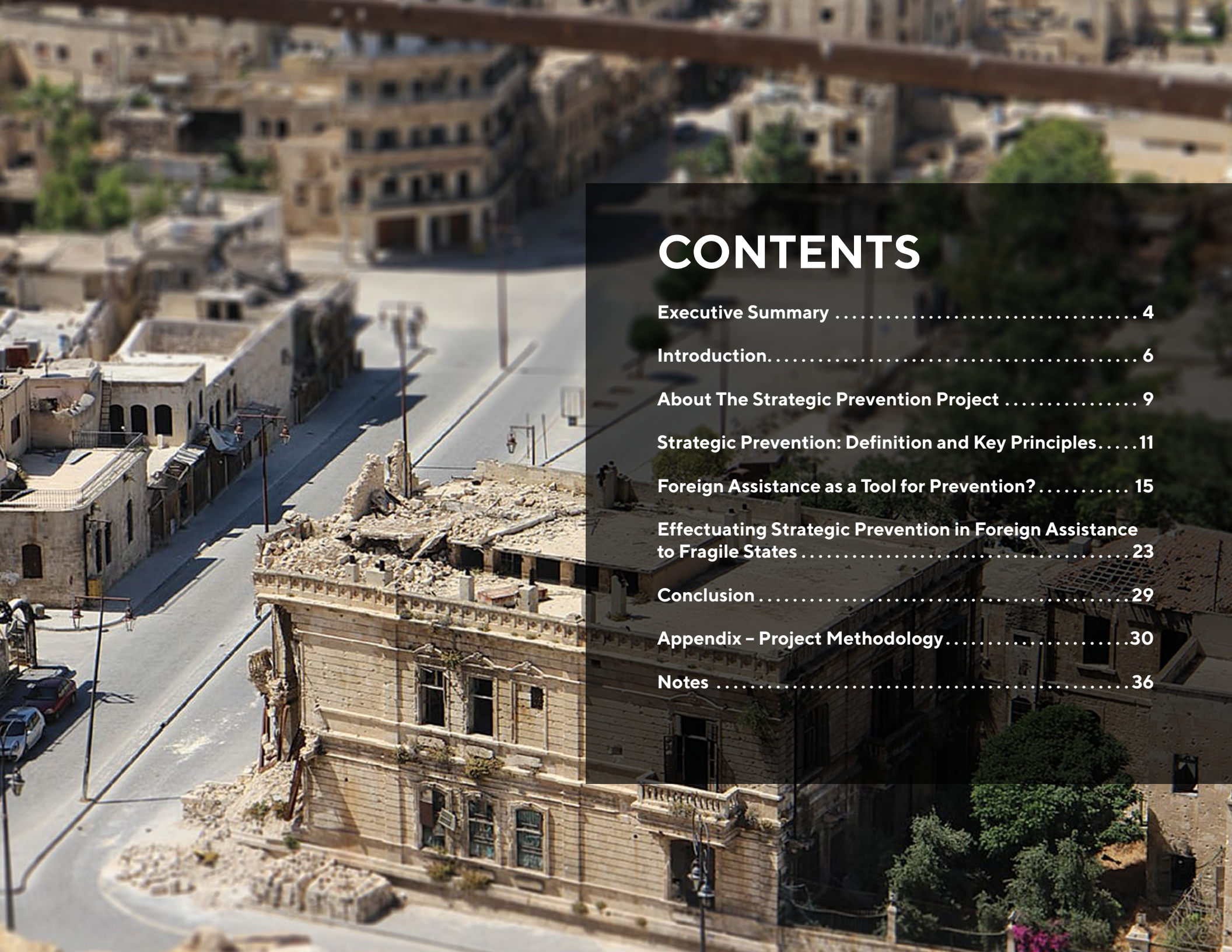
*"Evaluation of U.S. Foreign Assistance as a Tool to Prevent Conflict and Instability in Fragile States"*

**Cover Photo: Gail Morgado, State/CSO**

In the run-up to the 2013 elections in Kenya, the United States government worked with a local cross-sectoral civil society coalition, Champions for Peace, to organize and train boda boda riders to assist with violence prevention efforts. This boda boda rider proudly wears his vest from one workshop, emblazoned with peace messaging, as he walks his daughter home.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2017) called for new and more targeted efforts to strengthen fragile states. There is a growing consensus inside and outside government on the need for more strategic and preventative approaches toward fragile states. Overall international foreign assistance to fragile states has grown significantly over recent years – now totaling over $65 billion a year – but only a small fraction of those resources directly focuses on preventing violent conflict and instability.

Over the past year, the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources has undertaken the Strategic Prevention Project to assess how the United States and international partners can better target foreign assistance to prevent violent conflict in fragile states. The Project synthesized lessons learned from the research and practitioner communities and assessed how assistance has focused on prevention and incorporated best practices.

The Strategic Prevention Project affirmed that foreign assistance can help prevent violent conflict when it is sensitive to conflict risks, closely coordinated with diplomacy, and aligned with host-nation and local civil society reformers. However, the Project found that most assistance to fragile states over the past decade was designed to address other development and foreign policy priorities and was not focused on preventing violent conflict. Key areas associated with prevention – particularly promoting inclusive and just political systems – were not prioritized.

While every country is unique and prevention must be context-specific, the Strategic Prevention Project identified recommendations for better aligning assistance resources with efforts to prevent violent conflict. As a first step, the U.S. Government needs a better-defined framework and principles to guide foreign assistance and related diplomacy for this purpose. A new concept of "strategic prevention" can help to integrate efforts across sectors and categories.

The Strategic Prevention Project identified further steps that could ensure the implementation of assistance that reinforces the goals of strategic prevention. This includes mainstreaming and expanding upon existing tools to ensure conflict-aware assistance design across sectors and strengthening connections between assistance and preventative diplomacy. Additionally, the U.S. Government should encourage increased investment among all donors in programs that align with conflict prevention principles.

There is a unique moment of opportunity now to rethink the role of foreign assistance in preventing violent conflict and instability in fragile states. A growing body of research and programmatic evidence has galvanized attention and support in the U.S. Congress and across the international community. By effectuating a more strategic approach to prevention in fragile states, the United States can pave the way for greater coordination and burden-sharing, increased stability and self-reliance of key partner nations, and, ultimately, better outcomes for the American taxpayer.

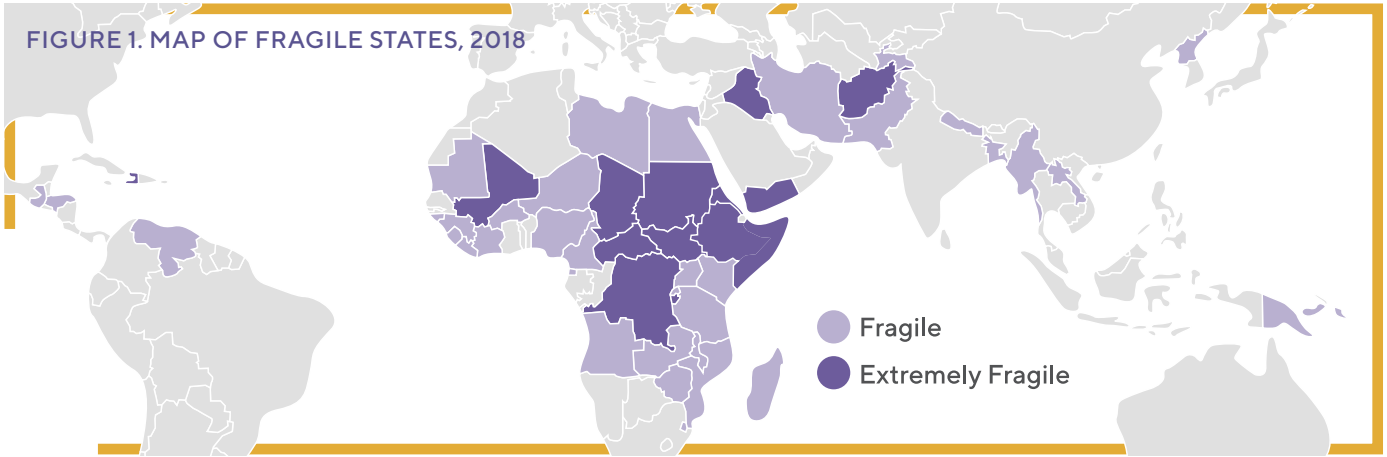
# INTRODUCTION

## THE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE OF PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT IN FRAGILE STATES

Violence begets violence. It is a contagion that spreads with exposure; distorting social norms, undermining institutions, and destroying countries and lives. Fragile states – states characterized by a combination of a breakdown in the relationship between state and society, exposure to risks, and insufficient capacity or willingness of state and society to mitigate those risks – are particularly susceptible to destabilizing violence and armed conflict. These conditions also enable violent extremist and criminal organizations to operate and recruit new adherents.

Fragile states are also susceptible to destabilizing threats by external malign actors such as political subversion and interference. U.S. policymakers have expressed increasing concern about how China and Russia may be using increasing influence in certain fragile states, gained by sovereign loans and debt obligations, to promote undemocratic governance practices. The resulting diminished respect for rule of law, corruption, and authoritarianism further raise the risk for violent conflict and instability in those countries over the long run.[1] This in turn opens the door for further cycles of political subversion and violence.

FIGURE 1. MAP OF FRAGILE STATES, 2018




Note: Countries are classified according to the OECD report States of Fragility 2018

Once large-scale violence takes hold, the human, financial, and geopolitical consequences can be enormous and difficult to reverse. In 2016, 37 countries were experiencing armed conflict, more than any other time in the last 30 years.[2] As a result of those conflicts, more people are forcibly displaced worldwide than any time since the Second World War. By 2030, more than 60 percent of people in extreme poverty are projected to be living in fragile and conflict-affected states.[3] Accordingly, there is a growing recognition of the importance of conflict and violence prevention to stop such crises before they emerge. Every dollar invested in such prevention now could save donors upwards of $16 in the long run, according to a recent study.[4]

Recognizing the challenges, the international community has increased attention and resources to fragile states. Net official development assistance (ODA) to designated fragile states increased to more than $65 billion in 2016.[5] The World Bank has doubled its pledged funding for fragile and conflict-affected countries.[6] However, more assistance to fragile states has not necessarily translated into more assistance for preventing violent conflict per se. Of total net ODA to fragile states in 2016, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) calculated that only 2 percent went to conflict prevention and only 10 percent went to peacebuilding.[7] In response, countries such as the United Kingdom have committed to increase the proportion of their ODA focused directly on reducing violence.

*"Political problems are at the root of most state fragility. The United States will prioritize programs that empower reform-minded governments, people, and civil society. As the United States designs its efforts, inputs from local actors improve the likelihood of enduring solutions, reduce costs, and increase accountability to the American taxpayer."*

*— U.S. National Security Strategy (2017)*

The United States has recognized the need for new approaches to strengthen select fragile states. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2017) highlights that transnational criminal organizations and violent extremists continue to use fragile states to establish safe havens, expand their operations, and recruit new adherents. At the same time, the U.S. Administration has highlighted a commitment to be more selective and strategic in how it works to prevent and mitigate conflict in fragile states, pressing local and international partners to share the burden.[8] This commitment is further reflected in the U.S. Government's *Stabilization Assistance Review*, completed in 2018.

There is also growing recognition across the U.S. Congress and outside expert community on the need for a more strategic approach to prevent violence in fragile states. A high-level bipartisan Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States has called for a new "Strategic Prevention Initiative" to curb the spread of violent extremism. A bipartisan group in Congress has introduced the *Global Fragility Act* (H.R. 2116, S.727), which passed in the House of Representatives in late May. To be successful though, new policy commitments must ultimately translate into new priorities and practices – especially for shaping the billions of dollars in assistance provided to fragile states each year. The Strategic Prevention Project was established to confront this challenge and opportunity.

*"The United States needs to adopt a different approach. To break out of the costly cycle of crisis response and push back against the growing threat of extremist political orders, U.S. policymakers need to better balance efforts to respond to terrorist threats with efforts to prevent these threats from arising in the first place."*

*— Preventing Extremism in Fragile States: A New Approach Final Report of the Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States (2019)*

# ABOUT THE STRATEGIC PREVENTION PROJECT

With the support of the National Security Council staff, the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources ("F") launched the Strategic Prevention Project in 2018 to identify how the United States and international partners can better target foreign assistance to priority fragile states to reduce the risk and severity of violent conflict.

F oversaw this study, in close partnership with the Department of State's (State) Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) and the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL) and Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA). A broader group of State, USAID, and other U.S. Government stakeholders provided input and expertise throughout the undertaking, including members from the Departments of Defense, Justice, and Treasury as well as the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). Representatives from multilateral donors, think tanks, advocacy-based organizations, academic institutions, and implementing partners also contributed their expertise through interviews, focus groups, and roundtables during initial data collection and later feedback sessions on the analysis and findings.

With this project, F and its collaborators sought to better understand the extent to which the current thinking on good practices in conflict prevention translated into practice in past U.S. assistance strategy and plans. The Strategic Prevention Project specifically aimed to:

- Marshal and consolidate insights from vast academic and policy literature on preventing violent conflict in fragile states as well as from expert interviews of policymakers, academics, and practitioners;
- Assess historic U.S. and international assistance spending patterns and strategic focuses with corresponding proxy indicators across eleven focus countries according to those consolidated best practices; and
- Identify, vet, and validate recommendations for a primary audience of U.S. Government policymakers to improve future foreign assistance to high-risk fragile states.

Frontier Design led the research and analysis efforts for this Project. Given budget and scope constraints, the Strategic Prevention Project was not a field- or program-level evaluation nor a statistical analysis of correlation. It did not focus on any single foreign assistance account; rather it sought to identify overall trends and insights that could be applied across U.S. foreign assistance in each country's context.

For more details on the Project's research and analysis methods, see the Appendix. The Strategic Prevention Project focused its analysis primarily on foreign assistance. However, the Project recognized from the start the critical role that diplomacy and defense play in conflict prevention. Many of the Project's conclusions highlight linkages between assistance and diplomatic, defense, and other economic tools. In addition, the Project noted that funding priorities were often directed by the U.S. Congress or the Administration in support of other foreign policy goals.

**The Project relied upon broad pattern analysis of assistance spending and conflict prevention practices from qualitative and quantitative sources, which included:**

- A literature review of over 150 U.S. and international publications on violence, conflict prevention, and fragility;
- Individual interviews, consultations, and focus groups with over 100 conflict prevention experts and practitioners across the U.S. Government, multilateral and bilateral institutions, academia, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
- Analysis of U.S. Government and international assistance spending patterns from 2007-2016, alongside indicators for governance, stability, and related principles for eleven focus countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Honduras, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Peru, Tunisia, and Ukraine): countries that were not experiencing armed conflict in 2006-2007 but demonstrated high levels of fragility and conflict risks;
- A review of U.S. Government operational plans for foreign assistance and similar strategy and operational documents from multilateral partner donors for alignment with conflict prevention principles; and
- Two qualitative deep dive cases (Kenya and Indonesia) to better understand the U.S. Government's applications of best practices, including a review of program evaluations and related documents and interviews with select regional experts.

# STRATEGIC PREVENTION: DEFINITION AND KEY PRINCIPLES

The Strategic Prevention Project focused primarily on lessons and good practices of conflict prevention but sought to expand upon traditional understandings of conflict prevention to overcome sectoral barriers and address evolving challenges facing fragile states. Accordingly, the Project introduced and expanded upon a new concept of "strategic prevention." This new concept bridges two categories of conflict prevention approaches commonly referred to in the prevention literature: *operational* or short-term efforts to mitigate escalating conflict risks and *structural* or longer-term efforts focused on addressing root causes and risks of violent conflict.[9] It underscores the need to apply the full array of foreign policy tools and capabilities – across diplomacy, defense, foreign assistance, and private sector investment and trade – to achieve prevention goals. At the same time, the concept promotes a strategic and targeted approach based on assessment of core U.S. interests, influence opportunities, risk factors, and cost-effective use of resources.

Through an extensive review of literature and expert consultations, the Project distilled and validated twelve core principles for strategic prevention in fragile states, outlined in Figure 2. These principles build upon recent major studies on prevention and fragile states, in particular the UN-World Bank's *Pathways for Peace* and the London School of Economics (LSE)-Oxford Commission on State Fragility, Growth, and Development. These principles are organized into three categories: (1) promoting inclusive and just political systems that foster social cohesion; (2) increasing institutional resilience to shocks and threats; and (3) strengthening pro-peace constituencies and mechanisms.

As its first pillar, strategic prevention in fragile states involves promoting inclusive and just political systems that foster social cohesion. The level of polarization in weak or partial democracies is the most predictive variable for which countries are likely to fail or experience violent regime change.[10] A recent comparative study found that a major factor separating the outbreak of violent conflict from sustained peace in certain countries was the "the implementation of policies that enabled previously excluded groups to influence government policy."[11] The grievances that fuel conflict are often rooted in historical, cultural, geographical, and socio-political dynamics unique to each context. However, in general, efforts to foster inclusiveness and cohesion should include enhancing capacities that enable equitable access to security and justice as public goods, supporting social and economic linkages across different communities, providing incentives to address the needs of marginalized and minority groups, and encouraging institutional reforms in governance functions to increase legitimacy.

FIGURE 2. PILLARS OF STRATEGIC PREVENTION

The second pillar of strategic prevention in fragile states is to increase institutional resilience to political and economic shocks and threats. Shocks such as natural disasters, price inflation, or disputed elections, as well as persistent threats such as endemic corruption and transnational crime often lead to instability in fragile states. The ability of the government and society to address the impacts of these shocks and threats quickly and fairly is critical to reduce the risk of violent conflict and instability.[12] Potential entry points include strengthening election administration, management, and monitoring; promoting government "checks and balances" (e.g., fostering parliamentary capacity, strengthening the rule of law, and bolstering independent media and civil society watchdog organizations); advocating for and investing in the role of women in positions of leadership across public and private spaces; and assisting in the development and implementation of disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies and mechanisms.

*"[A]n escape from fragility is a gradual process of the state developing effective checks and balances on power-holders and developing a sense of common public purpose...the building blocks of effective democracy – including checks and balances, rule of law, and protection of minorities – are more important than the actual event of holding a multi-party election."*

*— Escaping the Fragility Trap, LSE-Oxford Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development (2018)*

*"Exclusion from access to power, opportunity, services, and security creates fertile ground for mobilizing group grievances to violence, especially in areas with weak state capacity or legitimacy or in the context of human rights abuses."*

*— Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, UN-World Bank (2018)*

The third pillar of strategic prevention is to strengthen pro-peace constituencies and mechanisms. Especially in fragile contexts, non-governmental systems and entities wield significant influence and can support societal resilience through a range of social institutions, such as the private sector, schools, and civil society.[13] All of these institutions can serve as critical constituencies to reinforce peace. To bolster their peacebuilding role, assistance could aim to strengthen mechanisms by which these entities handle conflict and sustain peace. This could include targeted efforts to improve the private sector climate for small- and medium-sized enterprises, foster improvements in and sustainable financing of education (particularly secondary education) and strengthen civil society capacities for mediation and dispute-resolution. When linked with civil society, regional institutions, such as the African Union, and other sub-regional bodies, which have deep context-sensitive insights and long-standing regional trust, are invaluable for early warning and response to escalating risks.[14]

Both the content of assistance and how that assistance is delivered matter for effective strategic prevention. Both the approach and quality of intervention matter greatly for impact. How assistance is delivered can either reduce or reinforce group divisions and grievances. Strategic prevention is an inherently political endeavor and must be sensitive to how assistance impacts national and local power dynamics. Local commitment and political will to support prevention will influence the effectiveness of external assistance.

> *"A country's fragility is like a complex, chronic medical condition: treating it requires a multi-pronged and often experimental approach that can include, for example, facilitating equitable access to security and justice, building social and economic ties among communities, and strengthening mediation and alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms."*
>
> *— USAID Policy Framework: Ending the Need for Foreign Assistance (2019)*

In its recent report, the *Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States* outlined principles for how to implement prevention assistance, complementing the findings of the Strategic Prevention Project.[15] Assistance must both begin early and be sustained for prevention to be successful over the long-term.[16] Likewise, prevention must be founded on a context-sensitive analysis and on monitoring of risk and resilience and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to contextual changes.[17] Coordination is at the heart of effective prevention, both in terms of coordination between U.S. Government agencies and across sectors, and in division of labor, harmonization, and information sharing with other donors.[18] Perhaps most importantly, efforts must prioritize supporting nationally- and locally-led visions and initiatives to promote lasting, sustainable peace.[19]

# FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AS A TOOL FOR PREVENTION?

## ANALYZING SPENDING OVER THE PAST DECADE

The Strategic Prevention Project reviewed assistance spending and planning documents from the past decade (2007–2016) to a sample of fragile states to understand the extent to which U.S. and other donors prioritized preventing violent conflict and the above principles across assistance. Assistance spending patterns were also assessed in light of stability and conflict trends in those countries over the past decade, using proxy indicators from among publicly available datasets such as the Fragile States Index and the Varieties of Democracy Institute.

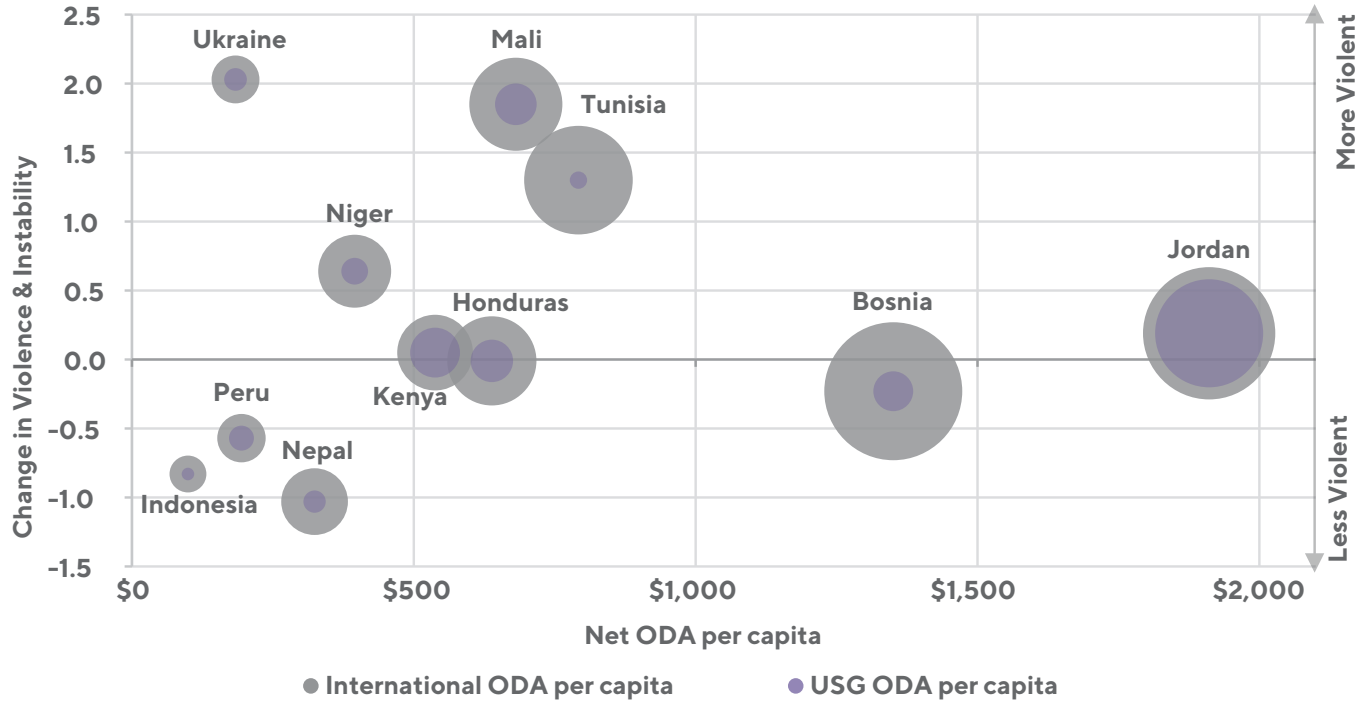
In all contexts, U.S. assistance serves multiple policy objectives dictated by various Congressional and Administration directives, such as those for global health, food security, and basic education. This Project aimed to identify areas where assistance was aligned with and contributing to the prevention of violent conflict, even if that was not a stated primary objective of assistance. It is important to understand the findings in this light. Nevertheless, this analysis revealed several key insights for future efforts to elevate strategic prevention in foreign assistance approaches:

1. ***In most fragile states, the United States and other international donors have not identified prevention of violent conflict and instability as an explicit goal for assistance.***

Specific goals for preventing violent conflict and instability were not outlined as priorities in most of the country assistance plans reviewed. The lack of explicit goals for prevention makes it difficult to assess the associated alignment and impact of assistance resources. The notable exceptions were in places where the United States and other international donors focused on supporting peace agreement implementation (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia). In most countries, assistance priorities reflected the objectives of Congressional and Administration directives, including Presidential Initiatives for development assistance globally, such as PEPFAR. Nevertheless, since 2016, USAID staff report they have begun to include more conflict-related development objectives in strategic planning documents for select fragile states.

Some assistance documents imply a broad link between increased levels of foreign assistance and the stability of the recipient countries. Among the countries analyzed, there is evidence that sharply increased assistance helped countries withstand political and economic shocks such as refugee influxes (e.g., Jordan) or contested elections (e.g., Kenya) and prevent an escalation of violent conflict. However, as shown in Figure 3, the Project's analysis of the eleven case study countries did not demonstrate a direct connection between overall levels of assistance and stability. The priorities, strategy, and quality of assistance mattered at least as much as, if not more than, the volume of assistance.

FIGURE 3: ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PER CAPITA AND CHANGES IN LEVELS OF VIOLENCE, 2007-2016

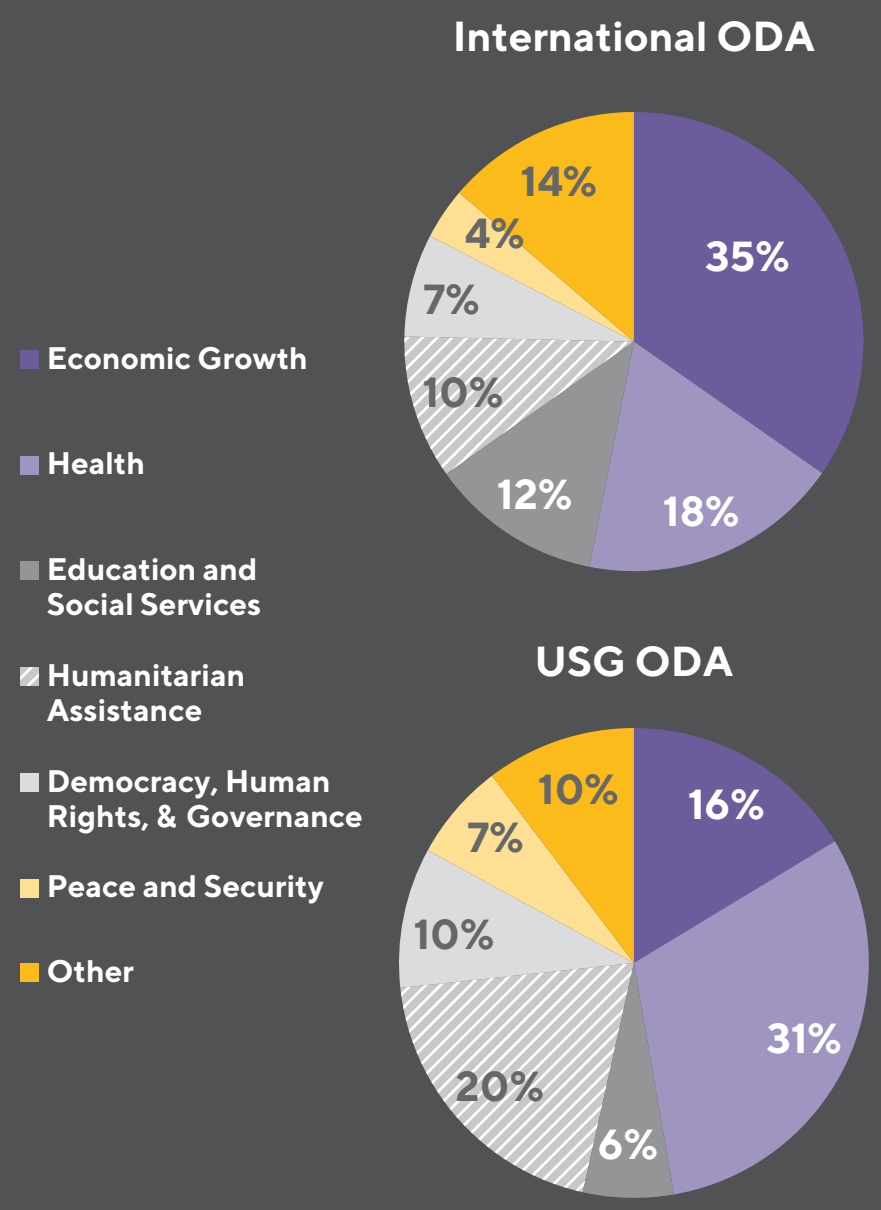



Source: OECD DAC Development Finance Data; World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators

## 2. *A significant proportion of foreign assistance to fragile states has been devoted to economic growth, education and social services, and health, without stated links to prevention.*

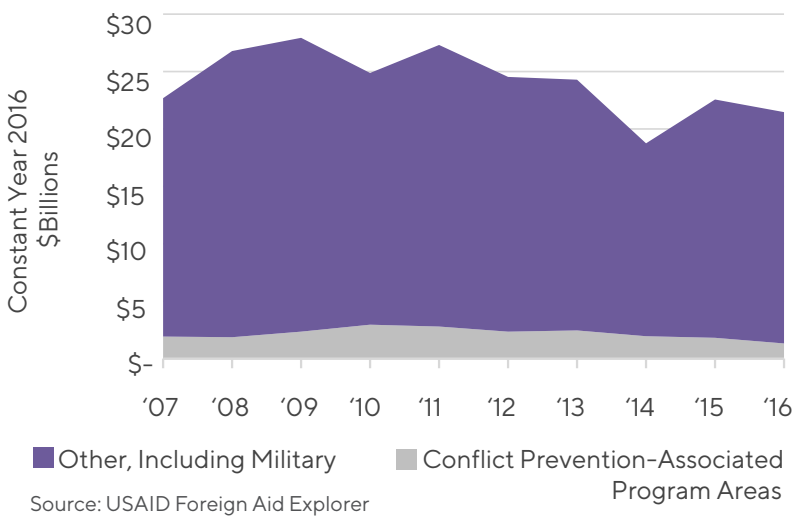
Figure 4 shows the breakdown of U.S. and international ODA to the analyzed countries by sector. Assistance programs for economic growth, education and social services, and health account for approximately two-thirds of this assistance. Such programs are foremost responsive to their own sectoral objectives. Although at the same time, these programs can support prevention goals if they focus on promoting political inclusion and social cohesion or strengthening pro-peace constituencies as secondary objectives. The assistance plans for most of the countries reviewed did not examine such connections or make links to prevention in these program areas. Based on interviews, the lack of a common analysis of conflict risks and resiliencies impeded cross-sectoral coordination. Indonesia provided a positive example, however, of how proactive conflict sensitivity can be incorporated across sectors.

FIGURE 4. NET ODA TO SELECT FRAGILE STATES BY SECTOR 2007-2016



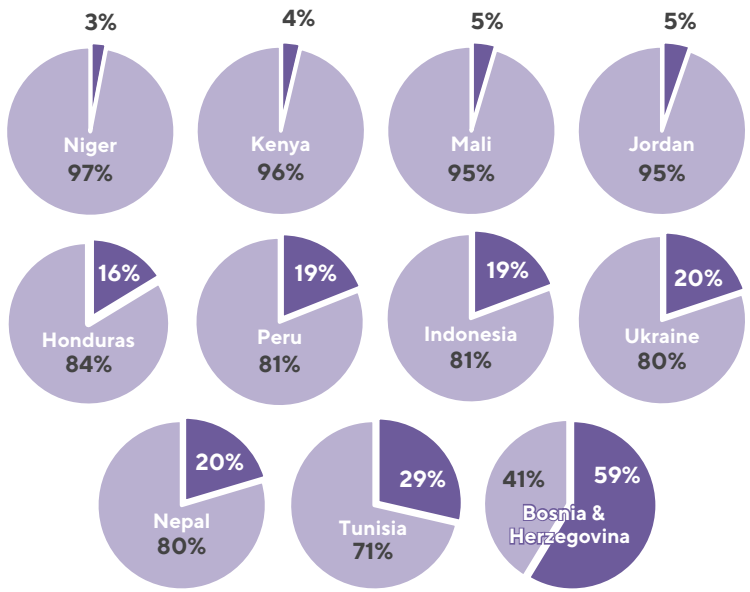

Source: OECD DAC Development Finance Data

FIGURE 5. U.S. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO FRAGILE STATES, 2007-2016




Source: USAID Foreign Aid Explorer

FIGURE 6. PROPORTION OF U.S. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE DEVOTED TO AREAS ASSOCIATED WITH PREVENTION, 2007 - 2016




Source: USAID Foreign Aid Explorer

## 3. *Levels of assistance to program areas directly linked to prevention of violent conflict have varied considerably across fragile states but have remained constant overall.*

The Project identified several categories of assistance that most closely aligned with the outlined principles for strategic prevention, such as good governance, rule of law and human rights, civil society, and conflict mitigation and reconciliation (for more details, see the Appendix). We estimate that 9 percent of all U.S. foreign assistance to fragile states over the past decade went toward these program areas. Funding for these areas of assistance remained relatively constant over the past decade (see Figure 5).

The proportion of assistance to these areas associated with prevention varied dramatically across the analyzed countries, with relatively lower levels in Africa and the Middle East. Among the eleven countries in this study, the Project assessed that the percentage of U.S. foreign assistance that went toward the categories directly linked to strategic prevention ranged from 3 percent to 59 percent (see Figure 6). In Africa and the Middle East, large amounts of assistance were focused on health, humanitarian, and counterterrorism objectives, while resourcing certain prevention-related areas (e.g., good governance, civil society strengthening) was less of a priority. This is, in part, a result of global Congressional and Administration directives for U.S. assistance spending that affect allocation of assistance to fragile states.

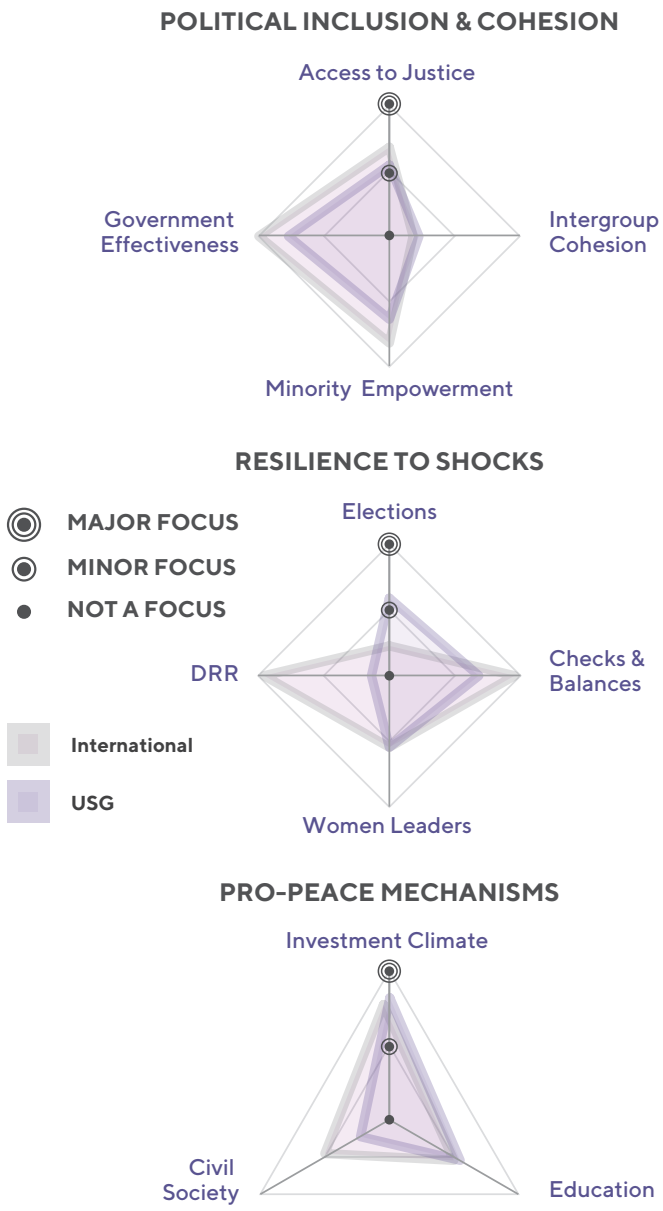
## 4. *The United States and other international donors have incorporated some strategic prevention principles in assistance to fragile states, but other key principles have been seldom applied (e.g., political inclusion, social cohesion).*

Examination of U.S. Government and international partner strategy documents revealed areas of strategic alignment and divergence in application of the above principles for strategic prevention (see Figure 7). Across most of the analyzed countries, donors placed significant focus on improving the capacity of governance institutions and fostering a better climate for economic investment. However, addressing the political barriers to inclusion, seeking to build meaningful ties across divided groups, and strengthening civil society mediation capacities did not appear to be major areas of strategic focus for assistance in most of the countries analyzed.

> The charts to the right are based upon an analysis of U.S. and international partner strategic documents from 2007-2016, averaged across the eleven focus countries.[20]

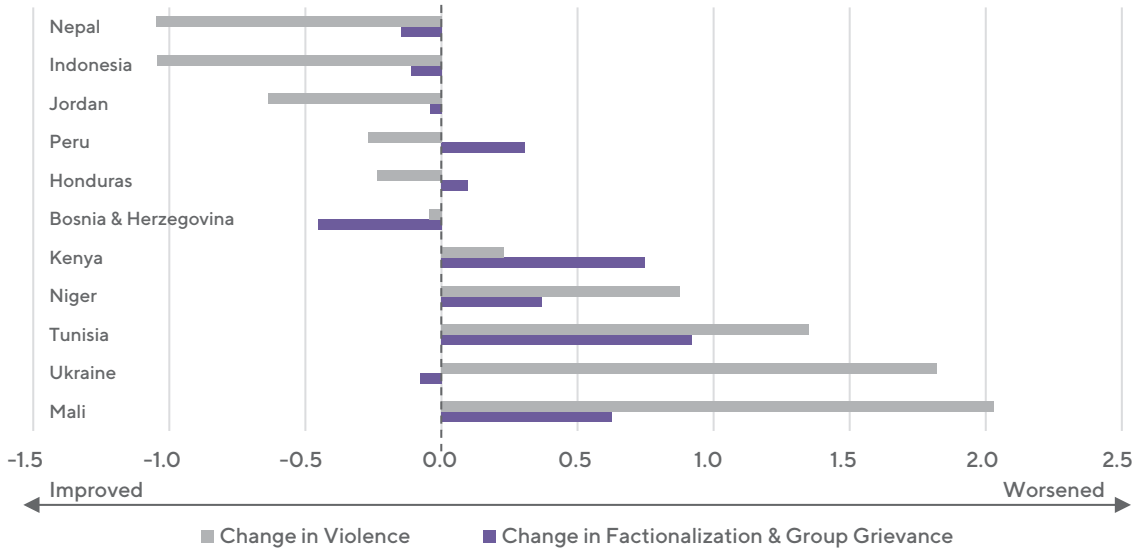
Supporting institutional reforms in governance functions to effectively deliver services was a significant priority for U.S. and international assistance in many countries, but far less priority was given to promoting inclusive and just political systems that foster social cohesion and reduce group divisions. The Project highlighted increasing research showing that increased group factionalization is often associated with increased violence, while decreased factionalization often accompanies reduced violence. As shown in Figure 8, the Project's analysis of the eleven sample countries further affirmed the link between intergroup cohesion and risks of violent conflict.[21]

FIGURE 7. FOCUS ON PREVENTION PRINCIPLES: ALIGNMENT OF U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE PLANS, 2007-2016



Additionally, the United States provided high levels of security sector assistance (SSA) to several of the analyzed countries. Research suggests that SSA can contribute to prevention by reinforcing institutional resilience to shocks and threats, but it can also aggravate conflict drivers and group divisions if poorly delivered and not coordinated with larger prevention strategies.[22]

FIGURE 8. INTERGROUP COHESION AND PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE




Source: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators; Fragile States Index

The net level of U.S. SSA to the eleven countries was not associated with net changes in violence and instability across the countries. Based on the Project's review of assistance plans, much of the SSA provided to these states was focused on building the capacity of partner security forces to disrupt threats (e.g., terrorism) and/or secure borders. While some programs included efforts to improve security sector governance, access to justice, and the rule of law, these areas appear to be secondary priorities or not prioritized in several of the analyzed countries. State officials report that there have been some promising initiatives in recent years to promote more holistic approaches to SSA in fragile states, such as the *Security Governance Initiative*.[23]

## 5. *Foreign assistance is most effective as a tool of prevention when it is closely coordinated with diplomacy and incentivizes host-nation reform agendas.*

Political transitions and electoral periods pose particular risks and opportunities; timely external assistance has been successful at preventing violence when linked to diplomatic engagement. After the violence of the 2007 Kenyan elections, the United States and other donors sharply increased assistance to prevent violence through the 2013 election. This sharp increase in assistance was accompanied by targeted diplomatic efforts, which contributed to relatively violence-free elections in 2013. The deployment of diplomats from CSO to key violence-prone "hot spots" in Kenya helped to better fuse diplomatic action with programmatic interventions (see Box 1). Sustained engagement to promote democracy and governance is also important; in some countries, efforts to prevent electoral violence were not followed by broader assistance to strengthen democratic institutions and address polarization resulting from contested elections.

### BOX 1: KENYA
### LINKING ASSISTANCE AND PREVENTATIVE DIPLOMACY

Polarized politics tied to ethnic groups, weak rule of law, and longstanding socio-economic grievances drove violence after the 2007 election that killed over 1,100 and displaced 650,000.[24] Recognizing a need for targeted prevention around Kenya's elections, international assistance to Kenya increased dramatically following the 2007 elections and remained at high levels until after the 2013 elections.[25] During this period, U.S. and international engagement in Kenya demonstrated that coordinated diplomacy at both the capital and sub-national levels can help monitor flashpoints, provide a critical link between political messaging and assistance, and support local civil society reformers.

In the 2013 elections, both State and USAID deployed additional officers to support the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi to monitor sub-national areas and tailor programs in potential hotspots. State/CSO staff coordinated international election monitoring and facilitated interagency cooperation to prevent electoral violence. CSO field staff worked closely with USAID to ensure high-level diplomatic messaging was closely coordinated with U.S. and other donor election programing. Staff flagged signals of hate speech and supported coalitions of Kenyan civil society actors dedicated to peaceful elections. Meanwhile, high-level diplomacy on delicate topics made space for field-level implementers. For example, in one case, Embassy-level engagement with a Kenyan political party protected USAID youth political participation programs in the field.[26]

### BOX 2. INDONESIA
### ALIGNING ASSISTANCE WITH LOCAL LEADERS, PARTNERS, AND DONORS

In Indonesia, the United States and other donors aligned assistance with the Government of Indonesia's national development plan, which prioritized conflict prevention and social cohesion.[27] USAID/Indonesia based its five-year development plan upon intensive individual and group consultations with people in national and local governments, civil society, universities, private sector, religious leaders, and other stakeholders at all levels society, which provided a deep understanding of conflict risks and resiliencies. Successful programs supported political and civil society reformers at the national and local level, such as members of parliament, city council members, or religious leaders.[28]

Indonesia also provides a good example of close coordination between international donors. As the third largest donor after Japan and Australia, the United States provided an estimated 11 percent of assistance to Indonesia from 2006 to 2016. The United States coordinated closely with Australia, an influential power in the region, on areas of comparative advantage and burden sharing. During the 2014 elections, both donors funded separate components of election administration programming; when the U.S. moved out of that sector, it handed off its programming to Australia, demonstrating a practical model for cooperation.

Assistance is also most effective when it is aligned with host-nation leaders and priorities, fostering local ownership and sustainability, in line with development cooperation effectiveness principles. Indonesia provides a positive example in this regard (see Box 2). However, coordinating with national leaders can be difficult in many fragile environments where leaders benefit from exclusionary practices. Analysis is critical to understand the interests and incentives of those leaders and how external assistance may affect those dynamics. In such difficult cases, assistance should be targeted and sequenced to lay the groundwork for future prevention efforts. Donors should look for ways to support non-governmental actors who can serve as critical pro-peace constituencies.

# EFFECTUATING STRATEGIC PREVENTION IN FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO FRAGILE STATES

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

*"The Secretary of State, in coordination with the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Secretary of Defense...[shall] establish an interagency initiative...to stabilize conflict-affected areas and prevent violence and fragility globally."*

*— Global Fragility Act (H.R. 2116, passed May 21, 2019)*

Every country is unique, and prevention must be context-specific. Nevertheless, analysis of assistance spending over the past decade demonstrates the need for better defined principles and guidelines for preventing violent conflict and instability that can be applied across fragile states. The below recommendations outline steps that could be taken to elevate and effectuate strategic prevention in foreign assistance. These recommendations complement those of the recent final report of the Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States and would also position State and USAID to better implement the *Global Fragility Act* if enacted into law.

### 1. *Establish Agreed Principles for Strategic Prevention: Elevate and mainstream the concept of "strategic prevention" and associated principles in assistance planning for relevant fragile states.*

The first step toward ensuring U.S. foreign assistance is aligned and advancing prevention of violent conflict is to agree upon a clear framework and principles. This Project concluded that the concept of strategic prevention can help to elevate and integrate preventative efforts to address both short- and long-term risks and work across functional areas and foreign assistance sectors. State and USAID should agree upon a set of practicable principles for strategic prevention, building upon the principles identified by this Project (see Figure 2).

> *"And to improve our work in fragile contexts, we will integrate conflict-sensitivity across sectors and find innovative ways to address the low levels of capacity, commitment, trust, and social cohesion that pervade fragile countries."*
>
> *— USAID Policy Framework: Ending the Need for Foreign Assistance (2019)*

These principles can then be used to more rigorously assess the extent to which assistance plans for relevant countries are focused on preventing violent conflict and instability. The United States may have other national security goals (e.g., counterterrorism) that take precedence over prevention in the short-term in certain countries, but even in those instances, these principles can help to identify long-term risks and opportunities.

## 2. *Apply Strategic Prevention Principles across Assistance Planning and Implementation: Elevate, expand, and mainstream tools and practices for conflict-sensitive assistance analysis, planning, and design across sectors and across the U.S. Government.*

With agreed principles for strategic prevention, State and USAID should then take steps to ensure those principles and other good practices are applied consistently across assistance to relevant countries as identified by an interagency prioritization process. Assistance across sectors and across U.S Government agencies and departments should be informed by rigorous conflict analysis, particularly to assess risk factors related to patterns of social cohesion, perceived inclusivity between and among groups, and the current and potential degrees of factionalization or polarization among political elites. Analysis should also explore resiliencies and opportunities to promote inclusive, just, and accountable systems through assistance programming.

As shown in Box 3, USAID has developed multiple documents and tools to inform conflict-sensitive programming over the past fifteen years (e.g., *A Guide to Economic Growth in Post-Conflict Countries*). Several State bureaus have also incorporated relevant best practices into their programming guides, for example with justice sector programming. Yet, to date, these best practices and technical guidance have not been applied consistently or comprehensively across the U.S. Government. These guidance tools should be mainstreamed across the design and delivery of all assistance in relevant countries. Additional guidance documents should be developed as necessary, for example to promote conflict-sensitive programming in the major assistance areas of education, health, or the security sector. State and USAID should expand related training opportunities for assistance planners.

### BOX 3. SAMPLE LIST OF EXISTING USAID CONFLICT-SENSITIVE GUIDELINES

- Conflict Sensitivity in Food Security Programming
- Oil and Conflict- Technical Brief
- Women & Conflict
- Electoral Security Framework: Technical Guidance Handbook for Democracy and Governance Officers
- Energy Security and Conflict: A Country-Level Review of the Issues
- Checklist for Conflict Sensitivity in Education Programs
- Water & Conflict
- Religion, Conflict & Peacebuilding
- Youth & Conflict
- Livelihoods & Conflict

### 3. *Promote Greater Coherence between Assistance and Diplomacy for Strategic Prevention: Establish mechanisms and processes to ensure programmatic interventions in relevant countries are better coordinated with preventative diplomatic efforts.*

Strategic prevention is an inherently political endeavor that seeks to strengthen the capacity of local leaders to manage conflict peaceably, adapt to shocks, and guard against subversion by malign external actors. Accordingly, assistance should be closely coordinated with diplomatic engagement at the national and local levels to enable a political impact. As demonstrated in Kenya, diplomatic efforts can help to target assistance, facilitate its delivery, and amplify its effects. Elsewhere, U.S. embassies have rallied diplomatic, development, and defense actors around atrocities prevention objectives, increasing coordination and resource alignment.

> *"The Department [of State] and USAID will make early investments in preventing conflict, atrocities, and violent extremism before they spread."*
>
> *— Joint Strategic Plan: FY 2018-2022, U.S. Department of State & USAID*

State and USAID should explore ways to better integrate assistance with preventative diplomacy efforts, leveraging tabletop exercises, joint trainings, and integrated diplomatic and development field deployments.

Additionally, diplomatic efforts should promote strong coordination between assistance efforts and the reform agendas of host-nation leaders. In contexts where leaders and institutions lack sufficient capacity, the U.S. Government and other donors should pursue a gradual approach in working with local authorities, building their capacity before implementing improvements.[29] This will require greater emphasis on enabling diplomats and development officials to gain access to sub-national areas. Related, State and USAID have developed policy directives on adaptive management to facilitate continuous learning and adaptation of programming in complex contexts threatened by violence and fragility.[30]

## 4. *Mobilize Data to Track Strategic Prevention Assistance in Fragile States: Design meaningful metrics for tracking prevention-related assistance as well as conflict and violence trends and risks in relevant fragile states over time.*

The management specialist Peter Drucker famously said, "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it." State and USAID should establish better criteria for measuring which assistance programs and projects are supporting strategic prevention, which would allow for consistent categorization and more robust assessment of related assistance flows. This would help resolve the current challenge of accurate assessment exposed by this Project: inconsistent application of proxy categories for prevention across the U.S. Government and partners can lead to differing estimates of how much and which assistance to a given country is supporting prevention.

Additionally, more systematic tracking and rigorous analysis of data on conflict risks and resilience over time would inform better planning and review of U.S. Government assistance to relevant countries. State and USAID should agree upon a set of country indicators that reflect the strategic prevention principles as well as indicators of societal violence. Data on these indicators could be collected as part of existing mechanisms, such as State/CSO's new Instability Monitoring and Analysis Platform and visualized alongside related assistance in country scorecards. To support its country analysis, the Project developed a country scorecard that synthesized and visualized data on both assistance spending and stability trends (see Figure 9).

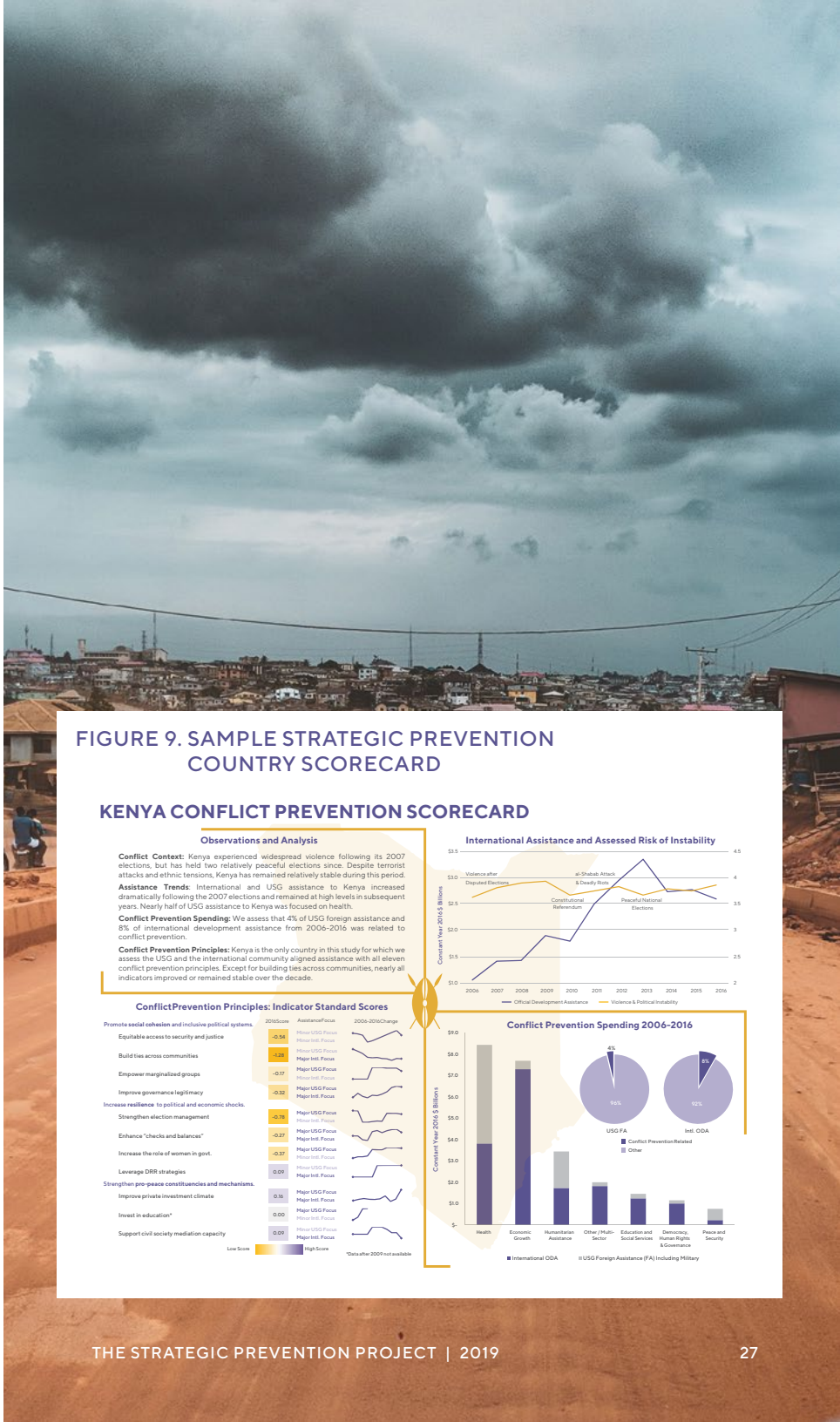


FIGURE 9. SAMPLE STRATEGIC PREVENTION COUNTRY SCORECARD

KENYA CONFLICT PREVENTION SCORECARD

Observations and Analysis

**Conflict Context:** Kenya experienced widespread violence following its 2007 elections, but has held two relatively peaceful elections since. Despite terrorist attacks and ethnic tensions, Kenya has remained relatively stable during this period.

**Assistance Trends:** International and USG assistance to Kenya increased dramatically following the 2007 elections and remained at high levels in subsequent years. Nearly half of USG assistance to Kenya was focused on health.

**Conflict Prevention Spending:** We assess that 4% of USG foreign assistance and 8% of international development assistance from 2006–2016 was related to conflict prevention.

**Conflict Prevention Principles:** Kenya is the only country in this study for which we assess the USG and the international community aligned assistance with all eleven conflict prevention principles. Except for building ties across communities, nearly all indicators improved or remained stable over the decade.

Conflict Prevention Principles: Indicator Standard Scores

| | 2016 Score | Assistance Focus | 2006–2016 Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Promote social cohesion and inclusive political systems. | | | |
| Equitable access to security and justice | -0.54 | Minor USG Focus<br>Minor Intl. Focus | |
| Build ties across communities | -1.28 | Minor USG Focus<br>Major Intl. Focus | |
| Empower marginalized groups | -0.17 | Major USG Focus<br>Minor Intl. Focus | |
| Improve governance legitimacy | -0.32 | Major USG Focus<br>Major Intl. Focus | |
| Increase resilience to political and economic shocks. | | | |
| Strengthen election management | -0.78 | Major USG Focus<br>Minor Int. Focus | |
| Enhance "checks and balances" | -0.27 | Major USG Focus<br>Major Intl. Focus | |
| Increase the role of women in govt. | -0.37 | Major USG Focus<br>Minor Int. Focus | |
| Leverage DRR strategies | 0.09 | Minor USG Focus<br>Major Intl. Focus | |
| Strengthen pro-peace constituencies and mechanisms. | | | |
| Improve private investment climate | 0.16 | Major USG Focus<br>Major Intl. Focus | |
| Invest in education* | 0.00 | Major USG Focus<br>Minor Int. Focus | |
| Support civil society mediation capacity | 0.09 | Minor USG Focus<br>Major Intl. Focus | |

Low Score — High Score

*Data after 2009 not available

International Assistance and Assessed Risk of Instability



Conflict Prevention Spending 2006-2016

### 5. *Engage Congress and Other Donors to Augment Strategic Prevention Programming: Work with Congress and other donors to promote programs that directly advance Strategic Prevention principles across priority countries, particularly to promote political inclusion, strengthen "checks and balances," and enhance civil society mechanisms.*

This Project found that, in many places where Strategic Prevention could have – and perhaps ought to have – been a leading policy priority, it was not. In particular, the Project identified opportunities to enhance assistance in the key areas of promoting political inclusion, fostering "checks and balances," and strengthening civil society capabilities to manage conflict. To the extent possible, State and USAID should engage with Congress to seek dedicated resources and flexibility to support cross-sectoral strategic prevention programming. The *Global Fragility Act*, as introduced by the House and Senate, would authorize funds for this purpose.

Additionally, other donors also have a critical role to play in supporting strategic prevention. The international community has increased funding for fragile states over recent years but needs to shift focus to how much of that funding is directly supporting prevention goals. The United States should use its influence with the World Bank and UN as international entities to promote this approach where possible. The United States should also continue to engage bilateral donors to promote greater coordination and burden-sharing, including complementarity, for strategic prevention. CSO represents State in the Stabilization Leaders' Forum (SLF),[31] which provides another diplomatic vehicle to advocate for prevention. Public-private partnerships for conflict-sensitive economic development are also a promising area. USAID's new *Private Sector Engagement Policy* suggests that the best private sector partners are those whose businesses depend on positive development outcomes. [32]

# CONCLUSION

Though difficult, foreign assistance can help to prevent violent conflict and instability through targeted, flexible, context-relevant approaches. There is a unique moment of opportunity now to elevate the role of foreign assistance as a tool of strategic prevention, with bipartisan agreement in Congress on the need for prevention and increasing willingness on the part of international donors to invest in prevention strategies. Seizing this opportunity will require a more disciplined approach to how the United States and other international actors provide and structure assistance to fragile states at risk of violence.

This Project has identified concrete steps that can better align foreign assistance toward the prevention of violent conflict, incorporating strategic prevention across policy, planning, design, and delivery of assistance. By taking a more strategic approach to prevention in fragile states, the United States can pave the way for closer coordination with other international actors and promote greater stability and self-reliance of key partner nations. This strategic approach will enable the United States to better interrupt cycles of violence and fragility abroad, protect its long-term interests, and achieve better outcomes for the American taxpayer.

# APPENDIX – PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The Strategic Prevention Project was an overarching assessment of foreign assistance trends and practices, intended to inform future U.S. Government processes. It involved primary data collection through interviews, secondary quantitative analysis from publicly available data, and secondary qualitative analysis of assistance documentation. It did not involve field-level or program-level evaluation.

## THE PROJECT WAS ORGANIZED AROUND THREE PHASES:

- Phase 1: Marshal and consolidate insights from vast academic and policy literature on preventing violent conflict in fragile states as well as expert interviews of policymakers, academics, and practitioners;
- Phase 2: Assess historic U.S. and international assistance spending patterns and strategic focus with corresponding proxy indicators across eleven focus countries according to those consolidated best practices; and
- Phase 3: Identify, vet, and validate recommendations for a primary audience of U.S. Government policymakers to improve future foreign assistance to high-risk fragile states.

## • PHASE 1

For the first phase, the Project developed a set of strategic prevention principles through an extensive review of scholarly and practice-oriented literature from the last two decades and consultations with over one hundred conflict prevention and peacebuilding experts across government, academia, civil society, and partner institutions (see Box 4).

The research team compiled a presentation on "what we know" about preventing violent conflict in fragile states, which was presented to senior State and USAID leaders and informed the development of the strategic prevention principles. This report described those principles in brief, but more detailed information is available upon request.

BOX 4: EXPERT INTERVIEWS AND CONSULTATIONS

- Over 50 government officials from State, USAID, and the U.S. Institute of Peace
- Members of USAID's Fragility Working Group
- Advisors of the U.S. Institute of Peace's *Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States*
- UN officials and academic contributors to the UN-World Bank's *Pathways for Peace* report
- Lead authors of the OECD's *States of Fragility* report
- Lead evaluator for the European Union's conflict prevention and peacebuilding evaluation
- Experts from leading think tanks (e.g., American Enterprise Institute, Carnegie Endowment for Peace, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Council on Foreign Relations, RAND Corporation)
- Civil society and non-governmental representatives (e.g., Alliance for Peacebuilding, Catholic Relief Services, Cure Violence, Mercy Corps, Peace Direct, World Vision)
- Academic experts (Dartmouth, Johns Hopkins, Stanford)

BOX 5: CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF FOCUS COUNTRIES

- With guidance from an interagency steering committee, the Strategic Prevention Project study team selected eleven countries for pattern analysis using the following criteria. Countries were selected to represent a balance of different conflict and fragility profiles and regional variance, as well as availability of existing case study analysis.
- Countries that did not have an active major armed conflict in 2007: less than 1,000 battle deaths in 2007, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)[33]
- Countries with significant fragility: a score of 70 or greater (warning level) on the Fragile State Index in 2007
- Countries with high levels of or noticeable change in violence and instability during the subsequent decade, according to the World Bank's Political Stability and Absence of Violence indicator
- Countries with substantial levels of U.S. Government foreign assistance over the past decade
- Countries with national security relevance

## PHASE 2

In the second phase, the Project assessed the extent to which assistance from the U.S. Government and other international donor partners prioritized prevention of violent conflict and adhered to the strategic prevention principles through quantitative and qualitative analysis of assistance to eleven focus countries. Details on the selection of those country cases are provided in Box 5.

The Project compiled and analyzed assistance spending data for these focus countries, using both ODA data reported by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and U.S. foreign assistance data from the Foreign Aid Explorer.[34] The Project did not focus analysis on specific U.S. Government spending accounts but rather examined assistance patterns as a whole. To support that analysis, the Project identified specific OECD DAC purpose codes and U.S. Government sector codes that were most directly associated with the strategic prevention principles. The Project built upon the methodology used by the OECD in its States of Fragility report but expanded it. More details on these codes are provided in Box 6.

The Project reviewed assistance spending trends in light of conflict and stability indicators in the focus countries. The Project primarily used the World Bank's Political Stability and Absence of Violence Indicator, one of the Worldwide Governance Indicators, to represent conflict trends.[35]

The indicator was adapted for this study so that positive change indicated an increase in violence and instability through the transformation y = -x + 2.5, resulting in scores from 0 to 5, where 0 represents a stable, violence-free country and 5 represents extreme violence and instability. For more detailed analysis, the Project also selected proxy indicators for eleven of the twelve strategic prevention principles. Indicators were selected from publicly available data related to peace, conflict, fragility, and development trends. More details on these indicators are available upon request.

In order to determine the level of strategic focus the U.S. Government and other international donors placed on each of the strategic principles, the study team reviewed U.S. Government foreign assistance Operational Plans for each country from the years 2006-2016.

BOX 6: ASSISTANCE CODES FOR STRATEGIC PREVENTION

***OECD DAC Purpose Codes***

- Anti-corruption organizations and institutions
- Business support services and institutions
- Child soldiers (prevention and demobilization)
- Civilian peace-building, conflict prevention and resolution
- Decentralization and support to sub-national government
- Democratic participation and civil society
- Disaster prevention and preparedness
- Elections
- Employment policy and administrative management
- Ending violence against women and girls
- Higher education
- Human rights
- Legal and judicial development
- Legislatures and political parties
- Media and free flow of information
- Participation in international peacekeeping operations
- Privatization
- Public finance management
- Reintegration and SALW control
- Removal of landmines and explosive remnants of war
- Secondary education
- Security system management and reform
- Women's equality organizations and institutions

ADD

***USG Sector Codes***

- Civil Society
- Conflict Mitigation and Reconciliation
- Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
- Disaster Readiness
- Good Governance
- Higher Education
- Political Competition and Consensus Building
- Private Sector Competitiveness
- Rule of Law and Human Rights
- Stabilization Operations and Security Sector Reform
- Etc.

REMOVE

***OECD DAC Purpose Codes***

- Public sector policy and administrative management
- Tax policy and tax administration support
- Etc.

***USG Sector Codes***

- Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction
- Counter-Narcotics
- Counter-Terrorism
- Etc.

As a proxy for the international community, the team reviewed available UN Development Program (UNDP) Country Program Documents for each country from 2006-2016, which also documented related donor programming. This analysis was supplemented with strategic documents from the World Bank, the European Union, and regional development banks.

As referenced in the report, the Project developed a series of scorecards to visualize conflict, assistance spending, and related metrics for each of the focus countries. Scorecards like these could be used as a basis for data-driven monitoring of conflict risks and prevention-related assistance in select countries. Sample scorecards are available upon request.

Finally, to provide further insights into how assistance was delivered within particular contexts and coordinated with diplomatic efforts, the Project undertook qualitative deep dive studies of two of the eleven focus countries: Kenya and Indonesia. These deep dives included reviews of country assistance plans, evaluations, reports, and other program documents, as well as existing recent case study reports from partners. This was supplemented by interviews with current and former USAID and State personnel who had been active in Indonesia and Kenya during the past decade.

The findings of this phase of the Project have several important limitations. Given the Project's limited budget and scope, only eleven countries were studied as proxies for U.S. Government assistance recipients. With this limited sample size, the Project relied on pattern analysis of eleven focus countries rather than a statistical analysis for correlation. The Project did not seek to determine which assistance methods worked significantly better than others for preventing violent conflict, but whether and how strategic principles were incorporated into assistance in each country's context.

## PHASE 3

The final phase of the Project involved the development and synthesis of future recommendations based on the previous analysis. This phase of the Project included consultations with a wide range of State, USAID, and other U.S. Government stakeholders. The research team also partnered with the U.S. Institute of Peace and Alliance for Peacebuilding, respectively, to convene roundtables with academic and non-governmental experts and solicit their recommendations.

# NOTES

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[8] Kiron Skinner, "The U.S. Approach to Fragile States," presented March 14, 2019 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, https://www.state.gov/s/p/rem/2019/290715.htm.

[9] The research community has traditionally made a distinction between operational prevention (urgent, short-term or crisis-oriented activities taken to mitigate escalation of potential violent conflict, such as diplomacy and economic sanctions) and structural prevention (longer-term prevention focused on the broader enabling environment and root causes of conflict, such as security sector reform and human rights programs). Definitions of conflict prevention used by the U.S. Government and multilateral bodies vary between operational and structural prevention. The concept of Strategic Prevention is intended to encompass this full spectrum.

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[10] This was a key finding of analysis of the Political Instability Task Force (PITF) Worldwide Atrocities Dataset, by PITF founding member Jack A. Goldstone and his team. The PITF utilized data analytics to identify factors that could lead to political instability, state collapse, or violent conflict to advice the USG interagency, intel community, and the National Security Council of escalating risks.

See: Jack A., Goldstone, Robert H. Bates, David L. Epstein, Ted Robert Gurr, Michael B. Lustik, Monty G. Marshall, Jay Ulfelder, and Mark Woodward, "A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability," *AmericanJournal of Political Science* 54, no. 1 (2010): 190-208, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00426.x; Rachel Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security* (New York: Pantheon, 2008).

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[14] Seun Bamidele, "Regional Approaches to Crisis Response, the African Union (AU) Intervention in African States: How Viable Is It?" *India Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2017): 114–128, doi: 10.1177/0974928417690085; David Steven and Gizem Sucuoglu, "What Works in Conflict Prevention? Development-Security Diplomacy Collaboration towards Better Results," Center on International Cooperation (CIC), New York University, Background paper for United Nations–World Bank Flagship Study, Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict. (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017).

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[20] A principle was assessed to be a *major focus* if it was included as a major strategic goal, theme, or sector. A principle was assessed to be a *minor focus* of it was included in the strategic document at the programmatic or activity level.

[21] As shown in Figure 8, intergroup cohesion was measured using an average of the Factionalized Elites and Group Grievances indicators of the Fragile States Index (FSI). Risks of violent conflict and instability were measured

using the World Bank's Political Stability and Absence of Violence indicator.

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