Untangling the Complexity of Fragile States
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Her current research focuses on the intersection of constitutional order and conflict, the role of constitutional courts in securing stability in new democracies, and the effectiveness of foreign aid in promoting good governance. She holds a MALD in comparative law and development economics from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and she is pursuing a PhD in comparative constitutional law at the University of Texas at Austin.

This publication includes many contributions from Truman Security Fellows, Political Partners, and Defense Council members across government, academia, and civil society
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fragile states present one of the thorniest challenges of our time. Threats to U.S. national security—from terrorism and the spread of violence to pandemics and narcotrafficking—increasingly emanate from fragile states, making the effort to address state fragility a critical policy challenge. A growing portion of U.S. assistance and military resources are now spent responding to conflicts and atrocities after they occur—an approach that is both costly and ineffective. A strategic approach is needed to address this challenge.

Critics of more proactive measures argue that state fragility is too complex to assess—let alone to respond to—in a comprehensive way. In part, this is because scholars and policymakers have often approached the concept of fragility in competing ways and with disparate goals in mind. A first step toward a new strategic approach to fragile states will be a unified definition of fragility and a comprehensive assessment framework focused on preventing the onset of crises.

Over the past fifteen years, scholars have made significant advances in understanding fragility and the conditions that contribute to state crises. Underlying conditions—geographic, economic, institutional, and social—contribute directly to state fragility and interact with one another, creating fragility traps. Other more immediate triggering factors can tip the balance of these conditions into crisis. These triggers vary widely but can include sudden political transitions, economic shocks such as rapid shifts in commodity prices, or environmental shocks such as droughts and other natural disasters. Some countries face higher risks that such triggers will occur and, having occurred, that they will lead to a full-blown crisis.

The new administration should establish a streamlined U.S. government-wide approach to assess priority fragile states, identify local conditions and potential triggers empirically linked to the onset of state crises, and use this analysis to design and coordinate preventive action. The U.S. intelligence community produces a number of predictive early warning products, but more is needed to leverage such predictive products to spur and inform preventive action. Assessments should be completed as bilateral processes, leading toward joint action plans with well-defined target results. In addition to engaging host government policymakers, country assessments should engage other local stakeholders to the maximum extent possible.

The United States cannot provide all countries with the sustained support needed to fully address the conditions of fragility. For this reason, a new U.S. strategy toward fragile states should focus first on aiding fragile U.S. security partners.
DEFINING FRAGILITY

The proliferation of policy and research initiatives around fragile states has done much to illuminate the challenges faced by fragile states, but the varied definitions, goals, and approaches of these initiatives have also generated a certain amount of conceptual confusion.

This conceptual confusion is seen first in policy documents that define fragility in very different ways, with disparate goals in mind. On the one hand, U.S. strategic policy documents—including the National Security Strategy and the Quadrennial Defense Review—tend to define fragility in terms of the consequences of fragile states, such as exploitation of ungoverned territory by extremist organizations. By contrast, operational documents—including U.S. military field manuals and USAID assessment frameworks as well as some international development plans—tend to define state fragility primarily in terms of its conditions, such as illegitimate governance and an inability to deliver basic services, and its precipitating causes or triggers, such as economic shocks and inter-communal violence. This is telling: the strategic implications of fragile states may have driven the high-level, strategic policy focus on fragile states over the last fifteen years, but as the U.S. government seeks to operationalize a more proactive policy, it must also focus on the conditions and causes of fragility itself. Moving forward, the U.S. government would benefit from adopting a unified definition of fragility across agencies and policy levels to guide action.

Policy and research initiatives also vary in terms of their outcomes of concern. Studies focus on states that are “fragile,” “weak,” “failing,” or “failed” and often use these terms interchangeably. Further, among actors primarily interested in conflict prevention, indices often conflate two types of fragile states—those at risk of conflict and those currently involved in conflict. Yet these distinctions—between fragile and already-failed states, and between states in conflict and at risk of conflict—are important for any policy that seeks to prevent conflict and state failure.

Finally, many academic definitions of fragility—and thus the policy definitions based on them—are descriptive rather than predictive. The Fragile States Index, for example, describes fragile states by 12 attributes that include over 100 sub-components reflecting both fragility dynamics and follow-on state-failure events such as coups and internal conflict, meaning the index already captures and describes state-failure events and thus cannot be used to predict them. This is key: without a definition and analytical framework focused on predicting state crises, policy interventions cannot be systematically designed to prevent them.

The primary goal of a new comprehensive U.S. strategy for fragile states should be to prevent state-related crises before they occur. As a first step, policymakers need a definition of fragility that is predictive of those crises: states are fragile to the extent they are at higher risk of experiencing state-related crises. We recommend that interagency efforts to define fragility draw
on the work of the U.S. government-funded Political Instability Task Force, which gauges fragility in terms of the probability of experiencing three broad types of state crises: adverse regime changes (such as coups), civil wars, and mass atrocities.\textsuperscript{viii}

By adopting a shared, predictive definition of fragility, the U.S. government can create a common foundation for understanding the drivers of fragility in a country and developing a coordinated response.

UNDERSTANDING FRAGILITY

There is a growing body of empirical research and emerging consensus on the conditions that increase the fragility of states.\textsuperscript{ix} Jeremy Weinstein and Milan Vaishnav provide an excellent overview of this research in their chapter in the Center for Global Development book, Short of the Goal, identifying three categories of conditions that impact state fragility—geography, economic welfare, and institutions—to which we add a fourth category: social divisions. We summarize these as well as research from more recent sources below.\textsuperscript{x}

Geography: Mountainous terrain, which increases the feasibility of insurgency, can make states more vulnerable to crises.\textsuperscript{xii} Natural resource deposits, which enhance the rewards of capturing territory or control of the government, can provide incentives for non-state actors to challenge the state.\textsuperscript{xii} Research has found that, in recent decades, oil-producing states have been 50 percent more likely than other states to experience civil wars.\textsuperscript{xiii} Having neighboring states that are unstable and suffer conflicts appears to play an even greater role in increasing fragility.\textsuperscript{xiv} Poorly governed neighboring states provide insurgent groups a safe haven from which to operate and can lead to spillover effects such as the diffusion of violence and paramilitary groups.\textsuperscript{xv}

Economic Welfare: Poverty, income inequality, and sharp declines in income can increase the risk of internal conflicts.\textsuperscript{xvi} Pockets of poverty within countries may make individuals more vulnerable to recruitment by insurgents. The governments of poor countries may also have difficulty amassing the resources to effectively deter insurgencies.\textsuperscript{xvii} Relatively low integration in the global economy also has a negative effect, as this too tends to lower economic opportunities and also reduce the financial options available to states seeking to avert or manage crises.\textsuperscript{xviii}

Institutions: Research has demonstrated that partial democracies—which formally adopt competitive executive selection and free political competition but have deficiencies in the execution of these functions—and transitioning states undergoing substantial or rapid reforms are the most fragile states—far more so than rigid dictatorships.\textsuperscript{xix} Fragility can be further assessed in terms of institutional deficiencies or malfeasant political leadership that weaken the legitimacy and performance of governments.\textsuperscript{xx} Similarly, criminal-state collusion distorts government policies and undermines the rule of law.\textsuperscript{xxi} Corruption can have a particularly devastating role in undermining institutional effectiveness and legitimacy over time. Patronage-based and rent-seeking economic policies create challenges for the equitable provision of public goods and services.\textsuperscript{xxii}

Societal Divisions: Recent studies show that while ethnic diversity is not itself a fragility risk factor, deficits in social cohesion can become expressed dangerously in institutions that cut off
certain groups from power and resources. States that are dominated by a particular ethnic group to
the exclusion and detriment of others have increased odds
of state crises.xxiii

In addition to directly contributing to fragility, these
conditions can also interact with one another, creating
fragility traps. Geographic factors—such as access to the
ocean, climate for agriculture, and exposure to diseases—
substantially influence incomes and opportunities for
trade.xxiv Geography has also influenced institutional
development: colonial-era extractive institutions, some of
which endure, weaken checks on state power and can
undermine perceptions of legitimacy,xxv and natural
resource wealth can bolster and sustain authoritarian
institutions in states dependent on resource rents.xxvi
Poverty can weaken the institutional development and
effectiveness of the state. By fostering incentives for neo-
patrimonial rule, poverty can also set the stage for
entrenched patterns of corruption and ethnic bias.xxvii A
wide body of research has demonstrated the powerful and
varied role of institutions in shaping economic
outcomes.xxviii Ethnic divisions can shape both the development of institutions and the perception
of those institutions as effective and legitimate.

Further, the potential consequences of fragility—conflict and other crises—create feedback loops
that in turn negatively affect poverty, institutions, and divisions. Prolonged violent conflict tends
to reduce the caliber of leadership and institutions that will shape a post-conflict setting. The
entrance of weapons, destruction of livelihoods and opportunities, and hardening of grievances all
increase the odds that countries will suffer new crises in the years immediately following
peace.xxix Coups, mass atrocities, and other political violence have equally negative effects on
institutional development, leadership, and investments in human development.xxx

In addition to national dynamics, it is also important to examine sub-national variations in
poverty, institutions, and social divisions that can drive local conflicts, as in, for example, the
persistent insurgency in the Southern Philippines and ongoing violence in Northern Nigeria.
Violence spreads like an epidemic, particularly in the context of broader institutional weakness
and societal fragmentation. Fortunately, recent scholarship has improved our understanding of the
drivers of violence at a local level.xxxi

While these longer-term, often slow-moving conditions represent the dry tinder of state fragility, other more immediate factors provide the sparks that ignite crises. Potential sparks—or triggers—
vary widely but can include the death of a ruler and other sudden political transitions, contested
elections, economic shocks such as rapid shifts in commodity prices, environmental shocks such
as droughts and other natural disasters, crises in neighboring states, and military or governance
catastrophes. While there is less empirical evidence linking specific triggers to fragility, it is clear
they play a role. Triggering dynamics shift perceptions and incentives, and they can provide
openings for local actors to contest the nature and control of domestic institutions, undermining the stability of states. Because of their economic composition, political systems, or geography, some countries face higher risks that such triggers will occur and, having occurred, that they will lead to a full-blown crisis. xxxii

ASSESSING FRAGILITY

The U.S. intelligence community produces a number of early warning products that assess both the long-term conditions and triggering dynamics described above. Three systems for predicting the onset of crises—the U.S. Army’s Fuzzy Analysis of Statistical Evidence, the U.S. military’s Integrated Crisis Early Warning System, and the USG-funded academic consortium now called the Political Instability Task Force—assign precise, regularly updated risk scores with a high degree of predictive accuracy. The National Intelligence Council produces a biannual Internal Instability Watchlist and an Atrocity Watchlist. Qualitative tools, including the intelligence community’s indicators assessments, examine underlying conditions and potential triggers to offer a more nuanced picture of not only the risk levels but also the specific drivers of fragility that could be addressed. xxxiii While these tools can and are being used in combination to understand instability phenomena around the world, more is needed to integrate such predictive tools into a U.S. government-wide assessment framework for specific countries and to leverage these collectively to spur and inform preventive action.

A revised process for assessing the fragility of partner states will be integral to a new strategic approach. To prioritize crisis prevention in fragile states, the new administration would need to establish a streamlined analytical effort to ensure a cohesive U.S. government-wide approach to fragility.

A unified assessment process, focused on prevention, should have three core components. First, as discussed above, it should be grounded in a unified, predictive definition of fragility.

Second, country assessments should evaluate states’ fragility in terms of the conditions and potential triggers empirically linked to the onset of state crises. xxxiv As they evaluate the quality of a country’s institutions, assessments need to carefully unpack the specific weaknesses in the country’s security, political, economic, and social institutions, as suggested by USAID’s Fragile States Strategy, distinguishing between capacity deficits and deficits in legitimacy or political will, as well as the societal underpinnings of relevant institutions. xxxv These assessments should feed directly into Integrated Country Strategies, which coordinate development, diplomatic, and security engagement tools to respond to USG-wide priorities. Classified annexes of assessments should also describe risks to U.S. interests posed by the state’s fragility, ongoing U.S. efforts that could impact fragility for better or worse, and similar assessments of the engagement of other states. xxxvi

Third, rather than being completed only by U.S. policymakers, country assessments should be completed as bilateral processes that fully engage local stakeholders, beginning with government counterparts but also, to the extent possible, representatives of civil society and other sectors. Ultimately, the challenge will be to partner with states to design and implement plans to reduce their fragility. For this, country ownership will be paramount. A first step toward this goal will be
to arrive at a shared assessment of the problem—both within the U.S. government and with our partners.

PRIORITIZING U.S. FRAGILE STATES ASSISTANCE

The United States cannot and should not address fragility everywhere. In some countries, the United States lacks compelling interests. In others, it lacks influence. Instead, a U.S. strategy should target fragile security partners: countries that receive significant security assistance, exhibit significant levels of fragility, and are not actively engaged in major internal conflict. In these countries, crisis prevention should be a core goal of U.S. foreign policy.

Table 1 presents an illustrative list of 15 potential target countries, though more could be added. Most of these countries have not qualified for Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compacts due to corruption, deficits in governance, or, in a few cases, income levels that exceed the MCC qualifying thresholds. Several of those that have qualified, particularly those receiving higher levels of security assistance like Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine, did not move beyond the threshold country phase as they were unable or unwilling to undertake necessary reforms.

We recognize that most countries will not wish to self-identify as fragile. However, the United States has historically overcome that obstacle by creating new communities of partnership, including most recently the Alliance for Prosperity in Central America. A similar model might be possible in this case: an Alliance for Peace and Security.
Table 1. Prospective Partner Countries under a New Comprehensive Strategy for Fragile States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Estimated Security Engagement$xxxix</th>
<th>Fragility$xl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>$3,051,575,746</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>$2,818,661,777</td>
<td>Medium-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>$1,043,872,806</td>
<td>Medium-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>$813,643,094</td>
<td>Medium-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>$304,334,187</td>
<td>Medium-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>$296,379,044</td>
<td>Medium-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>$292,190,664</td>
<td>Medium-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>$270,188,048</td>
<td>Medium-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>$221,377,474</td>
<td>Medium-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>$190,547,247</td>
<td>Medium-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>$177,136,923</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>$175,863,381</td>
<td>Medium-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>$170,236,784</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>$152,072,213</td>
<td>Medium-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>$149,541,898</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a first step toward developing a new strategy toward fragile states, policymakers must adopt a common definition of fragility. Fragility should be understood as a predictive concept: fragile states are those more likely to experience specific kinds of state-related crises.

Second, policymakers must develop a shared analytical framework for understanding the risk factors that make states more fragile and therefore more susceptible to such crises. Fragility risk factors have been identified across four categories: geography, economic welfare, institutions, and social divisions. These can contribute independently to fragility and collectively in a vicious cycle that is difficult to escape. Such an understanding should guide the development of a fragility assessment process, similar to existing frameworks for democracy, rights, and governance assessments and conflict assessments.

To establish a unified and coherent process for assessing the various drivers of fragility, we recommend the following:

- **Define Fragility in Predictive Terms**: The U.S. government should adopt a common definition of fragility across agencies. Fragile states should be understood as those more likely to experience state-related crises—specifically adverse regime changes, conflicts, and atrocities.

- **Develop an Empirically Rooted Assessment Framework**: Country assessments should evaluate states’ fragility in terms of the conditions and potential triggers empirically linked to the onset of state crises. This should include but not be limited to a careful examination of the country’s security, political, economic, and social institutions, as suggested by USAID’s Fragile States Strategy, distinguishing between capacity deficits and deficits in legitimacy or political will.

- **Conduct Bilateral Country Assessments**: Assessments should be completed in full partnership with government counterparts in the fragile states to promote country ownership. They should also engage civil society leaders and organizations to the extent possible.

- **Focus First on U.S. Security Partners**: The United States lacks the capacity to provide comprehensive, sustained support to address the conditions of fragility in every country. Instead, Washington should focus first on fragile U.S. security partners.

The challenges that the United States faces vis-à-vis fragile states are not new. What has changed is that the costs of inaction have grown unacceptably high. The United States and its allies need a new approach that leverages the full range of our diplomacy, development, democracy, and defense tools to bolster the resilience of fragile states and their people. The start of a new administration provides a valuable opportunity to reappraise U.S. efforts in fragile states and implement a comprehensive new strategy.
APPENDIX

Below is a sampling of varied ways that U.S. government agencies have defined fragile states in recent years.

### Strategic policy documents tend to focus on consequences of fragility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Document</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Security Strategy, 2002&lt;sup&gt;li&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Weak states</td>
<td>“vulnerability to terrorist networks and drug cartels”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Security Strategy, 2006&lt;sup&gt;lii&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Weak states</td>
<td>“susceptible to exploitation by terrorists, tyrants, and international criminals”; “threat to their people and a burden on regional economies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Security Strategy, 2010&lt;sup&gt;liii&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Failing states</td>
<td>“endanger regional and global security”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Security Strategy, 2015&lt;sup&gt;liv&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Fragile states</td>
<td>“governance is weak or has broken down,” making them “vulnerable hosts for extremism and terrorism”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Security Presidential Directive, 2005&lt;sup&gt;lv&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Failed states</td>
<td>vulnerable to territory being used as “base…or safe haven for extremists, terrorists, organized crime groups”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadrennial Defense Review, 2006&lt;sup&gt;lvi&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Failed states</td>
<td>“terrorist extremists can more easily operate or take shelter”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, 2015&lt;sup&gt;lvii&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Fragile states</td>
<td>“sanctuaries for illicit activity”; “poor governance…. increases the risk of pandemics and violent conflict”; “imperil regional and international security”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Operational policy documents tend to focus on conditions and causes of fragility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Document</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Agency for International Development, 2005&lt;sup&gt;lvi&lt;/i&gt;</td>
<td>Fragile states</td>
<td>“ineffective and illegitimate governance” institutions; triggered by succession crises, contested elections, external shocks, corruption, conflict, economic collapse; result in economic instability, food insecurity, violent conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Army Field Manual, 2008&lt;sup&gt;l&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Fragile states</td>
<td>institutional weakness and government instability; driven by criminalization of state, economic failure, external aggression, internal strife due to disenfranchisement; result in human suffering, conflict, regional security challenges, “ungoverned areas that can become safe havens for terrorists and criminal” organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a prior paper, the authors argue that the changing national security landscape requires a comprehensive, strategic approach to fragile states—one that prioritizes fragile states and invests in the prevention of state crises. See Andrew Albertson and Ashley Moran, *A Call for a New Strategic Approach to Fragile States* (Washington: Truman Center, 2016).

See the Appendix for a sampling of recent U.S. government agency definitions of fragility.


USAID’s fragility framework describes the instability in fragile states as the product of “ineffective and illegitimate governance,” noting that fragility can be triggered by succession crises, contested elections, external shocks, corruption, conflict, economic collapse, and a range of other events. The U.S. Army’s field manual for stability operations likewise describes fragile states as having institutional weakness and government instability, driven by the criminalization of the state, economic failure, external aggression, internal strife due to disenfranchisement, and other factors. While both documents also discuss the consequences of fragility, they focus most pointedly on the *causes* and *conditions* of fragility itself. See USAID, *Fragile States Strategy* (Washington: USAID, 2005), 3-4; and U.S. Army, *Field Manual 3-07: Stability Operations* (Washington: U.S. Army, 2008), 1-10.

The 2010 QDDR, for example, asserts that it is “more important than ever to address the problems of fragile states,” elaborating with a discussion of the challenges of “[w]eak governments and failing states.” USAID notes explicitly that it uses “the term fragile states to refer generally to a broad range of failing, failed, and recovering states.” Likewise, the Fragile States Index uses all of these terms—fragile state, weak state, and failing state—interchangeably in describing its methodology. See DoS and USAID, *Leading through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (Washington: DoS and USAID, 2010), xiii; USAID, *Fragile States Strategy*, 1; and J.J. Messner et al., *Fragile States Index 2016* (Washington: The Fund for Peace, 2016), 12.


Adverse regime changes are defined as “major, adverse shifts in patterns of governance, including major and abrupt shifts away from more open, electoral systems to more closed, authoritarian systems; revolutionary changes in political elites and the mode of governance; contested dissolution of federated states or secession of a substantial area of a state by extrajudicial means; and/or near-total collapse of central state authority and the ability to govern.” Civil wars, which they label more precisely as revolutionary and ethnic wars, are respectively, “episodes of violent conflict between governments and politically organized groups (political challengers) that seek to overthrow the central government, to replace its leaders, or to seize power in one region”; and “episodes of violent conflict between governments and national, ethnic, religious, or other communal minorities (ethnic challengers) in which the challengers seek major changes in their status.” Mass atrocities, which they further categorize as genocides and politicides, “involve the promotion, execution, and/or implied consent of sustained policies by governing elites or their agents—or in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities—that result in the deaths of a substantial portion of a communal group or politicized non-communal group.”


These conditions, in turn, have their own causes—some of which also contribute to fragility. We discuss these interaction effects more later in this section.


Goldstone et al., “A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability.”


Goldstone et al., “A Global Model for forecasting Political Instability”; Collier et al., Breaking the Conflict Trap; and Fearon and Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.”


xxvi Thad Dunning, *Crude Democracy: Natural Resource Wealth and Political Regimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Michael Ross, “Oil and Democracy Revisited,” unpublished manuscript, 2009; and Ross, *The Oil Curse*. In assessing the interaction between natural resources and democracy, it is important to note that parts of this relationship are contested. Nuanced parts of this relationship, however, have been confirmed yet this requires distinguishing between resource effects in autocracies and democracies (since resources can sustain both, but under different conditions) and distinguishing between resource wealth and resource dependence, as the scholars cited here do.


xxix Collier et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap.*


One drawback should be acknowledged regarding our focus on using only factors empirically shown to be related to state fragility: some variables that appear anecdotally to be important are excluded from our approach because they cannot be easily measured. For example, some have pointed to the capacity of societies to resolve inter-communal problems, even independently of the state, or the sincerity and capacity of political leaders, as being important factors in reducing fragility. These factors asserted anecdotally to be important are not captured by our approach. However, by publically identifying and addressing measurable indicators of fragility, our approach seeks to maximize transparency, accountability, and results, as well as learning over time.


We do not mean to imply that the U.S. government should adopt an assessment framework based solely on the four categories of factors we identify in this brief as contributing to fragility, but that it should develop an assessment framework grounded in such factors empirically linked to the onset of state crises. This assessment framework should be continually reassessed and updated to incorporate the latest research and lessons learned.


Security assistance may include security-related aid, security cooperation, and arms sales. Unless otherwise indicated, this paper uses “security assistance” to connote this wider range of security-related engagement.

This illustrative list includes countries in the top half of security assistance recipients that also have fragility scores equal to or greater than 8 (medium-low fragility and above) on the State Fragility Index, and are not engaged in major internal conflict. For the purposes of this illustrative list, we employ relatively simple measures to provide a basic sense of the possible list; more complex measures should be used in practice. While quantitative data should guide country selection, we suggest that an interagency policy committee make final determinations on country inclusion. Inclusion would be iteratively re-evaluated. For this list, major internal conflict is defined as internal conflict that involves 1,000 deaths or more annually and contests control of the state. By this measure, Afghanistan, Central Africa Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen are excluded. OECD members (Mexico and Israel) and countries that receive significant assistance despite antagonism toward the United States (Russia and Cuba) are also excluded.

These calculations for security engagement include security assistance, security cooperation, and foreign military sales, as defined by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, and as available through the Security Assistance Monitor (www.securityassistance.org) for FY2014. Aid considered for each country includes both dedicated country aid and average allocations from regional funding streams for all regions within which that country falls. This calculation serves as a useful indicator for the overall security relationship with the United States.

The fragility score used in this table is taken from the State Fragility Index for 2014. See Monty G. Marshall and Benjamin R. Cole, *Table 1: State Fragility Index and Matrix 2014* (Vienna: Center for Systemic Peace, 2014).


