

Policy Memo

DATE: October 17, 2009

RE: Forging a US Strategy for Fragile States, a roundtable summary from the 50th Strategy for Peace Conference

Two prevailing themes came out of this roundtable discussion: 1) the need for high-order attention to the issue of how to deal with fragile states and 2) the need for a comprehensive approach, within existing structures, and beyond military and government agencies. This goes further than the usual whole-of-government approach most talk about. Instead, we need to reach out horizontally and vertically within the US government, and with other actors—in the host country, internationally, and in different domains not normally involved in fragile state discussions, including specialists on environmental, nature resources, and illicit financial economies. In doing this, the United States needs to develop greater country expertise and cultural sensitivity. Attention should also be given to fostering greater interagency dialogue and looking at the problem of how to deal with fragile states as a collective government challenge. Right now the whole approach is very fragmented, with different agencies setting different priorities, metrics, and definitions of success based on their own methodologies and goals.

In looking at the need for focus and prioritization of US strategy, we came up with different typologies of fragile states and the risk to US interests. Both need more refined analysis, but are a good place to start. In the typology of US interests, we defined states in three tiers:

- Tier 1—fragile states that are of high interest to the US, for example Afghanistan or Pakistan;
- Tier 2—fragile states that hold some degree of interest for a variety of reasons, for example the Philippines; and
- Tier 3—fragile states with relatively less importance, for example Zimbabwe.

Each tier and each country will require a different policy approach. Partnerships among US agencies and with international partners will vary with different approaches to the different tiers. Such a matrix should be used to determine where to focus, and it is very important that it be dynamic and constantly updated.

The roundtable also discussed the currently fragmented approaches to conflict prevention and risk mitigation in crisis situations. They should be brought together to reflect the full life cycle of the conflict.

Other issues which are not normally associated with conflict management need to be part of the discourse, including both positive and negative impacts, so that we do not get lost in the weeds and lose a global perspective. For instance, globalization, climate change, and transnational crime are some of the areas of vulnerability that affect crises and should be part of the conflict analysis. Furthermore, we should expand who we work with in crisis countries, incorporating actors that are not usually associated with conflict.

We discussed developing an interagency set of guidelines for selective engagement, in order to better identify core competencies and incorporate division of labor. Furthermore, we also need to change our approach to international participation, and incorporate partners who may be better than we are in certain areas.

In order to bring all of the pieces together, we need a better mission statement for fragile states that includes a discourse on US interests and values. It is critical to determine what we are trying to achieve, and what we mean by national interest. All of the processes described above need to be under constant review, and improved as required.

Several new actions were explored in order to facilitate better strategy toward failed states. First, the roundtable discussed creating a new directorate within the National Security Council that deals exclusively with conflict prevention and sustainable security which would coordinate with all relevant agencies including the State Department, USAID, and military representatives and other departments, with a mandate including creating a comprehensive US strategy. Another idea is the creation of rapid diplomatic response, or DART, teams, which would be followed with systematic, long-term strategic actions in-country.

One theme throughout the discussion was the need to take stock of what we are already doing and what we already have in countries around the world, as well as capabilities within the United States, in order to establish a baseline of current capacities. That sort of analysis would then allow us to see if we can come up with different approaches and perhaps better utilize what we have.

Finally, it was stressed several times that:

- Any organizational changes made need to have the necessary funding and authority to carry out their mandate. Also, mechanisms for self-evaluation and determining lessons learned need to be integrated into all of the new actions described above.
- Greater partnerships, both vertically within the US government and horizontally within crisis countries, need to be forged, bringing in more actors.

- A better public narrative on the importance of failed states will be key to the success of any US strategy.
- Better congressional outreach and perhaps a discussion on how to better organize congressional committees will facilitate getting funding in these new areas.

Each year the Stanley Foundation convenes the Strategy for Peace Conference on a wide range of US foreign policy issues with experts from the public and private sectors who meet in autonomous roundtables. This year's event focused on the challenges of state fragility for US and global security in an interdependent world. Specifically, via three concurrent roundtables, participants addressed the potential contributions of AFRICOM to problems of state fragility in Africa; the possibility of better US efforts at multilateral leveraging of latent international capabilities and capacities; and finally, the need for a new US strategy for strengthening fragile states overall. More information on the entire conference is available at <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/articles.cfm?ID=603>.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Memo do not necessarily reflect the view of the Stanley Foundation or any of the conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

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