

A U.S. Leadership Initiative to Reduce Global Violence

Justification
August 2017

Overview

The U.S. government should do for violence what it did for HIV/AIDs.

The world is experiencing a 25-year peak in violence.ⁱ For the first time since the Cold War, violence and violent conflict are increasing worldwide.ⁱⁱ

A landmark new study found that violence costs the global economy \$14.3 trillion a year – or 13.4 percent of world GDP.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to the World Health Organization, 1.3 million people die a year as the result of violence.^{iv}

After 15 years of fighting the Global War on Terror, 2014 and 2015 saw the highest rates of global fatalities due to terrorism in recorded human history.^v

And in January 2017, the United States' National Intelligence Council warned that the next five years will see rising tensions within and between countries."^{vi}

Reversing these trends in violence is the most critical national security challenge of our time.

To address this increase in violence, the U.S. government should treat this challenge with the urgency and focus it's applied to similar problem sets: by launching a new, comprehensive, interagency initiative focused on reforming U.S. foreign policy and streamlining foreign assistance to reduce global levels of violence and tackle the root causes of chronic instability in fragile states.

This new initiative should focus on 10 priority countries where strategic and appropriate U.S. investments to help partner nations and communities reduce violence can have a real impact in resolving chronic, costly U.S. national security challenges.

Like the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and subsequent reauthorizations, this would be a legacy U.S. foreign policy initiative that would have a timeless impact on stemming violence, protecting and promoting peace.

The Context

The global economy loses \$14.3 trillion a year due to violence; \$89.6 billion of this loss is due to terrorism.^{vii} For the first time since the 1990s, violence is on the rise worldwide. While civil and transnational wars are decreasing, domestic political instability is increasing and social violence outside of war zones is becoming more widespread.^{viii} 2014 and 2015 were the second and third worst years in terms of fatalities since the end of the Cold War. The costs of violence are felt by families, business, and governments alike.

Violence underpins and exacerbates the United States' chief national security challenges, namely: terrorism and migration. In 2015, 91% of terrorist attacks took place in countries either experiencing civil war or involved in an internationalized violent conflict.^{ix} ISIS capitalizes on atrocities, injustices during war time, and narratives of collective punishment to source its pool of recruits. And, violent conflicts are the key driver of forced displacement worldwide, including the migration crises on America's southern border and similar crises currently afflicting America's European and African allies.

Violence has caused the worst displacement crisis since WWII. Right now, 65 million people are currently uprooted from their homes. Unlike decades past, the primary driver of this historic displacement is violent conflict. Indeed, just ten years ago, roughly 80% of humanitarian aid went to helping the victims of natural disasters.^x Today, 80% of humanitarian aid is going to people fleeing violence, violent conflict, and oppression.^{xi} Wars across MENA, homicide across Latin America, state failure across North Africa, human trafficking across Asia, and state-led violence against civilians across the Middle East are producing displaced persons at unprecedented scale and exorbitant cost to the international community.



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Exposure to violence increases support for violence, fueling a dangerous cycle. Over the last fifteen years, 53 countries and nearly half the world's population, 3.34 billion, have been or are confronted with political violence.^{xii} Research increasingly finds exposure to violence as a predictor of future participation in violence, including violent extremism (or terrorism).^{xiii} Individuals who experience violence from state security forces, witness a drone strike on their community,^{xiv} or grow up in violent households are more likely to support intergroup violence at some point in their lives.^{xv} If the U.S. government seeks "get to the left of radicalization" – minimizing civilian exposure to violence on the front end is in its strategic interest.

The Policy Problem

There is no overarching policy framework governing U.S. policy or spending in fragile states towards an end goal of reduced violence or stability. U.S. engagement in fragile and failed states is governed by an outdated patchwork of authorities that prevents smart spending and project design.^{xvi} Neither U.S. Ambassadors nor USAID Mission Directors have the policy tools they need to effectively drive U.S. assistance towards a long term, overarching strategy with the end goal of reduced violence or improved stability. Without such a framework or such tools, U.S. efforts in places like Somalia, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) fail to effectively resolve conflicts expensive for the American taxpayer. Rollercoasters of conflict cycles persist, driving the need for interventions by the U.S. every few years, but there is never the right policy framework or investment portfolio needed to break cycles of violence for good.^{xvii}

The U.S. robustly funds violence containment, but underinvests in prevention and fails to shepherd crises through towards stable end states. Take Iraq as an example. In 2011, the U.S. spent \$47 billion for military operations in Iraq. Yet in that same year, the U.S. spent just \$184 million — .004% of \$47 billion — for all democracy, human rights, conflict mitigation, and reconciliation programs in the country.^{xviii} Globally, the U.S. is engaged in military and humanitarian operations all over the world seeking to effectively keep a lid on conflict. Almost nowhere do we have sustainable, accountable compacts with clear benchmarks for violence reduction and conflict transformation in fragile states that could prevent the need to intervene down the line.

Counter-terrorism strategies alone won't solve the violence problem. Since 9/11, the U.S. has spent nearly \$5 trillion dollars of taxpayer funds on Global War on Terror operations – and yet, global levels of terrorism, violent extremism, and violence are all simultaneously on the rise.^{xix} According to the House Republican policy blueprint, *A Better Way*, “America faces the highest terror-threat level since 9/11.”^{xx} This is because counter-terrorism is, by very definition, reactive and narrow in scope. To sustainably deal with terrorism, the U.S. must tackle the reasons why terrorist groups thrive: violence, grievance, and failed governance.^{xxi}

The global humanitarian bill keeps growing – principally due to a failure to end and prevent violent conflicts. Globally, there has been a 600% increase in global humanitarian appeals in the last 10 years, from \$3.5 billion in 2004 to over \$20 billion in 2016,^{xxii} primarily due to the failure of the international community to end violent conflicts, reduce violence, and stop the spread of violent extremists groups. The U.S. cannot turn its back on humanitarian commitments; besides supporting tens of millions of lives, it is not only what protects the U.S.’ global moral authority, but research shows that when we don’t help communities in need, support for violent extremist groups may increase.^{xxiii} Our only choice, therefore, is to address the root drivers of displacement.

The Policy Opportunity

Reducing violence through diplomacy and development is possible and measurable. The RAND Corporation has found that 80% of terrorist movements that ended between 1968 and 2006 were resolved through political settlements or improved community-level governance.^{xxiv} An October 2014 Latin American Public Opinion Project and Vanderbilt University impact assessment of the U.S. Department of State (DoS) CARSI program found that 51% fewer residents of “treated” communities reported being aware of murders and extortion, and 19% fewer residents reported having heard about robberies having occurred.^{xxv} Another 2016 impact evaluation of a five-year, USAID program in Somalia found that programming reduced youth’s propensity to participate in violence by 14% and lowered support for violence by 20%.

Focusing on violence reduction as a goal of foreign assistance is more cost effective than the current spending portfolio of crisis management and response. According to new research from the Institute for Economics and Peace, every \$1 dollar spent on peacebuilding would reduce the costs of responding to conflict by \$16.^{xxvi} According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – of which the United States is a founding and active member – if violence were to decrease uniformly across the world by just 10%, the global economy would gain 1.43 trillion dollars.^{xxvii} These monies, if recaptured, could help the U.S. and the world tackle a number of our most pressing economic, developmental, and environmental challenges.



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Americans seek bold leadership on global security. A recent bipartisan report on violent extremism commissioned by the Center for Strategic and International Studies found that American citizens sought bold and improved leadership from governments in curbing violent extremism and terrorism.^{xxviii}

There is bipartisan support for policy reforms that better address the root causes of conflict and resolve chronic national security crises. Members of Congress and the administration routinely call for new approaches to engage in fragile and failed states, including more investments in upstream prevention and conflict management. The Department of Defense (DoD) repeatedly asks Congress for more flexible authorities to allow them to support their civilian partners to resolve violence and/or prevent violent extremism on the front end. And DoD, DoS, and USAID recently endorsed an inter-agency approach to stabilization of failed and fragile states that calls for a new policy framework and more coordination.

The Proposal

Congress and the administration should work together to launch an initiative “to reduce global levels of violence and address the root causes of chronic national security challenges.”

Legislation to support administration efforts, if needed, could apply best practices and lessons learned from the authorizations of Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the Global Food Security Act (GFSA).

Specifically, the bill could:

1. Require the administration to establish an interagency ten-year strategy to significantly reduce global levels of violence and address the root causes of chronic instability in select fragile states, and to report back to Congress on what changes in law they would need to effectively execute this strategy;
2. Authorize the administration to operationalize this strategy in select target countries by making more efficient use of already appropriated dollars;
3. Like the Millennium Challenge Corporation, create indicators to help move fragile states on pathways towards graduation from support. These indicators would, for the first time ever, require and help the administration assess whether certain actions in a certain country are helping reduce violence and promote stability as determined by specific indicators of success.
4. Like the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), encourage expanded private sector efforts and public-private sector partnerships focused on reducing violence and addressing the root causes of violence and violent conflict; and
5. Expand R&D investments into effective approaches for violence reduction; peacebuilding; conflict prevention, management and management; improving governance capacities; and sustaining peace.

The strategy should be developed and led by the Administrator of USAID and Secretary of State, or their designee, and should outline how policy and assistance changes in 5-15 select states will enable the U.S. government to contribute towards significantly reducing global levels of violence.

As defined by legislation, country teams from “core” and “relevant” agencies will feed into the overarching strategy by identifying the key types of violence, and drivers to said violence, that they seek to reduce in each of the 5-15 select states; develop a comprehensive strategy to decrease said form of violence, including by identifying specific activities and interventions to reduce, manage, and/or prevent violence. Importantly, to ensure the bureaucracy helps – not hinders – this response,

the strategy and Congressional Notification that goes to Congress should identify what bureaucratic hurdles, funding limitations, or lack of authorities prevent a country team from implementing this strategy. Allowing country teams to identify the needed flexibility- be they transfer authorities between agencies or lift earmark requirements that don't address the specific target of violence reduction- will give those closest to the problem the ability to problem solve. Tough indicators and metrics of success imposed by Congress will ensure accountability for this new flexibility.

To ensure accountability, each country will have a 'lead agency' that's most appropriate to lead the implementation of the strategy. Globally the process should be overseen by one central Coordinator, but allow U.S. missions the flexibility to respond to the specific drivers of violence in each country and not be hampered by bureaucratic and budgetary stovepipes.

Similar to PEPFAR, Country Partnership Plans (CPPs) should be developed with the host government (where possible), civil society, and relevant U.S. agencies. CPPs will outline annual investments, strategies, and anticipated results in the U.S. national security objective of reducing violence and will be the basis for approval of progressive U.S. government funding in partner countries. Notably, these Partnerships should be set up as such – as Partnerships – announced in parallel with U.S. partner governments, helping symbolize the shared commitment to and value proposition in reducing violence and addressing the root causes of conflict so that the U.S. and its partners can move forward towards greater prosperity and economic integration.

Each CPP will require identifying and meeting an overarching goal of reduced levels of violence, violent conflict and/or fragility in select countries and include robust monitoring and evaluation requirements that emphasize targets that will move the countries towards graduation statuses of being either 'less violent' or 'less likely to fall into conflict.' The CPPs will also serve as the basis for Congressional notification, allocation, and monitoring of budget, goals, and targets and as an annual work plan for U.S. government activities in global violence reduction. Data from the CPPs will be essential for ensuring the initiative's transparency and accountability and maintaining a central database for lessons learned and future improvements. As there can be difficulty in providing direct budget support to fragile states, requiring a strong role for civil society – both in implementation of compacts as well as in ensuring transparency – should also be included.

Country Eligibility. Again building on best practices from PEPFAR, MCC, and Feed the Future, Congress should outline priorities for which countries should be selected to participate in the initiative. In order to target the most strategic countries and ensure that strategies and success metrics are reasonable, evidenced-based, and appropriate, countries should be divided into three different tiers.

This tiering may choose to align with one or more of already existing interagency lists, such as the existing interagency Atrocity Prevention lists, USAID's Fragile States and/or Complex Crises lists, or

interagency counterterrorism and violent extremism watch lists.

- Core Countries – where levels of violence are the highest in the world, and/or where violent conflict is currently ongoing;
- Threshold Countries – where levels of violence are significant and where the peace dividend needs supporting to prevent a backslide;
- Prevention Countries – where warning signs for future upticks in violence are of significant concern and where strategic prevention efforts could make a meaningful difference in mitigating violence.

Selection Criteria could include:

1. Levels of [mortality by or exposure to] violence [against civilians] in the country;
2. Number of persons displaced persons due to violence in the country;
3. Levels of violence against children and youth in the country;
4. Country ranking on key conflict and/or atrocity early warning lists;
5. Country ranking on key global fragility lists;

Agencies Involved

Central agencies:

- Department of State
- USAID
- Department of Defense

Relevant Agencies:

- Department of Justice
- Department of Commerce
- U.S. Trade Representative
- Department of Treasury (to ensure the U.S. vote at the World Bank is supporting COPs)
- Peace Corps
- Center for Disease Control

Efficiencies and Cost Savings

This reform initiative will save money for the U.S. taxpayer, by making more efficient use of already taxpayer dollars.

According to new research by the Institute for Economics in peace, the world spends \$14.3 trillion dollars containing violence and violent conflict. This equals 13.4% of global GDP. Of that \$14.3 trillion dollars, 0.9% is spent on peacebuilding and 1.1% on peacekeeping. **This means that 98% of global spending on violence is currently spent responding to or containing violence rather than preventing or actually solving it.**

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as mentioned above, if violence were to decrease uniformly across the world by just 10%, the global economy would gain 1.43 trillion dollars.^{xxix} These monies, if recaptured, could help the U.S. and the world tackle a number of our most pressing economic, developmental, and environmental challenges.

And, for the first time ever, a July 2017 World Food Programme (WFP) world food assistance report assessed a “stability” payoff of US\$2.24 billion per year if stability were brought to WFP countries -- savings to WFP that would be generated by enhanced stability in the large number of countries in WFP’s portfolio with high levels of instability, for example by allowing scarce public resources to be devoted to more productive uses, or by opening scope for scaling up successful innovations within the private sector.

Authorizing a new interagency initiative to reduce global violence and address the root causes of conflict can change this expensive and reactive spending portfolio by aligning multiple tools and equities towards overarching goals of violence reduction, alleviating bureaucratic inefficiencies in our Departments of State, Defense, and USAID caused by over-earmarking and lack of coordination, and making U.S. tax payer dollars work smarter and go farther.

While this concept hasn’t yet been scored by the CBO, we are confident there will be real cost savings for the American taxpayer and enormous benefits to increasing national and global security.

A Transformative Investment

The American people are concerned by the state of global instability and expect their government to announce bold, smart, and sound solutions that turn the page on 15 years of Global War on Terrorism policies, help alleviate the suffering of today's displaced, and keep Americans safe. ^{xxx}

At the same time, Congress and the U.S. foreign policy community are frustrated that two decades of sustained U.S. efforts in many countries around the world have yet to help countries break cycles of violence and propel them towards prosperity and peace.

A bold new initiative focused on reducing global levels of violence and addressing the root causes of conflict in fragile states provides a pathway forward to resolving both of these defining national security challenges.

PEPFAR, Feed the Future, and the Millennium Challenge Corporations are three of the most widely heralded U.S. foreign policy ventures of all time. The programs have been transformative – helping millions escape cycles of poverty and enjoy safe and productive lives. The legacies of these programs have transcended the individuals that launched them, enshrining in world history the United States' positive impact alleviating the suffering of millions of people throughout the world.

The 115th Congress has the opportunity to continue to advance the United State' global leadership and take on one of the most critical national security challenges of our time.

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