



TASK FORCE ON  
EXTREMISM IN  
FRAGILE STATES

# BEYOND THE HOMELAND

Protecting America from  
Extremism in Fragile States

INTERIM REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE  
ON EXTREMISM IN FRAGILE STATES

*September 2018*



UNITED STATES  
INSTITUTE OF PEACE  
Making Peace Possible

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H.R. 244 - CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2017  
Public Law 115-31, May 5, 2017

### **SEC. 7080.**

(b) COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.—Funds made available pursuant to subsection (a) shall be transferred to, and merged with, funds appropriated by this Act under the heading “United States Institute of Peace” for the purposes of developing a comprehensive plan (the Plan) to prevent the underlying causes of extremism in fragile states in the Sahel, Horn of Africa, and the Near East.

## Acknowledgments

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The Task Force is grateful to the U.S. Congress, particularly Senator Lindsey Graham, for entrusting it with this important task. It is deeply appreciative of the support it has received from the United States Institute of Peace and the Bipartisan Policy Center, on whose earlier work this effort builds. The work of the Task Force would not have been possible without the time and guidance that the Senior Advisors have generously given. Finally, the Task Force wishes to acknowledge and thank all those from the U.S. Government, policy community, academia, and civil society who have provided input and feedback on its deliberations.

## Disclaimer

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This report represents the consensus of a bipartisan Task Force with diverse expertise and affiliations. No member may be satisfied with every formulation and argument in isolation.

The findings of this report are solely those of the Task Force. They do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Institute of Peace or the Senior Advisors.



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# I. Executive Summary

Since the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, law enforcement has stopped many terrorists from entering the United States, and U.S. armed forces have eliminated large numbers of terrorists overseas.

Seventeen years later, the threat has evolved. **Violent extremism has spread across a wide arc of instability stretching through fragile states in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel.** These groups are present in 19 out of 45 countries in these regions and have held and governed territory in 10 of them. The United States has responded by conducting combat operations in 5 of the 45 countries and providing security assistance to 39 of them. But to stop extremists from spreading further and roll back their gains, we need a new strategy, one that focuses on the incubators of extremism: fragile states. Congress has charged this Task Force to devise such a strategy.

We confront a different strategic environment than on 9/11. **The Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel have become increasingly fragile. Extremists' strategies have evolved, and their focus is now on establishing a new political order. Meanwhile, America's rivals have seized on this disorder to grow their power and influence, preying on the weakness of state fragility.**

As a result, the threat that extremism in fragile states poses to the United States has also changed. **The dangers of extremism now extend beyond our homeland.** Violent extremism dulls America's ability to compete on the world stage. It undermines U.S. regional influence and the open, rules-based international order by fueling chaos that destabilizes neighboring countries, weakens U.S. allies, and triggers further crises, such as the unprecedented wave of refugees.

**As long as extremism fuels instability, the United States cannot compete effectively against strategic rivals such as China, Russia, and Iran.** Nor can the United States confront extremism without addressing the ways our rivals exploit and contribute to this threat.

**As the 9/11 Commission recommended in 2004, we need not only to attack terrorists and protect against their attacks but also to prevent the continued growth of violent extremism. A preventive strategy is a cost-effective and sustainable way to keep America safe.**

**The time has come for a new U.S. strategy.** We need not only to defeat individual terrorists but also to mitigate the conditions that enable extremist ideologies to take root, spread, and thrive. **Going forward, the priority for U.S. policy should be to strengthen fragile states—to help them build resilience against the alarming growth of violent extremism within their own societies.**

This interim report assesses the threat posed by extremism in fragile states, analyzes the conditions that fuel extremism, proposes a new set of strategic objectives for U.S. policy, and examines what we know about how to achieve these objectives. The Task Force will issue a final report in early 2019 to propose a comprehensive strategy for reducing extremism in fragile states.

As the 9/11 Commission recommended in 2004, we need not only to attack terrorists and protect against their attacks but also to prevent the continued growth of violent extremism. A preventive strategy is a cost-effective and sustainable way to keep America safe.

We have, thus far, lacked a common understanding of how to stop the spread of extremism. But a consensus is growing on what conditions fuel extremism; political will is building in the international community to act; and recent success stories give hope that we can make a difference.

**Extremism emerges through the confluence of poor and undemocratic governance in fragile states and extremist ideology and organization.** These conditions arise from the actions of regimes in fragile states, violent extremist groups, and international actors. In fragile states, governments lack legitimacy, and institutions struggle or fail to provide basic public goods—security, justice, and services. An effective strategy to combat extremism needs to tackle both the conditions that gave extremism a chance to take root in a society and the behavior of actors that spawned these conditions in the first place.

As President Donald Trump said at the 2017 Riyadh summit, we should build “a coalition of nations who share the aim of stamping out extremism and providing our children a hopeful future.”

Such a strategy cannot succeed without strong U.S. leadership and sustained commitment. **The United States needs to build productive national and local partnerships in fragile states for strengthening the resilience of their societies, including through humanitarian assistance; secure the political cooperation and financial support of international partners; dissuade countries from abetting extremism, corruption, and repression in fragile states; and unite disparate American and international efforts behind a common goal.** As President Donald Trump said at the

2017 Riyadh summit, we should build “a coalition of nations who share the aim of stamping out extremism and providing our children a hopeful future.”<sup>1</sup>

This approach does not call for the United States to undertake expensive attempts to remake far-off societies with very different cultures and histories than our own. We cannot. But we can work with partners to identify and target the discrete local conditions that fuel extremism.

**Cooperation to prevent extremism is an effective and sustainable strategy that will lower the costs that the United States bears.** Already, among the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union, and the Arab Gulf states, opinions are converging on the importance of tackling extremism in fragile states. If we lead that effort, our partners’ resources can leverage our own. Moreover, preventive measures cost far less than military interventions—saving \$16 for every \$1 invested<sup>2</sup>—and put fewer American lives at risk.

We want to foster resilient societies in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel that are capable of resisting the growth of violent extremism, so that we not only defeat today’s terrorists but also alleviate the conditions that spawn tomorrow’s.

A preventive strategy is neither passive nor naive.

The United States always reserves the right to use force and should do so to confront imminent threats posed by terrorism. The bigger challenge before us is to prevent future threats from emerging. We want to foster resilient societies in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel that are capable of resisting the growth of violent extremism, so that we not only defeat today’s terrorists but also alleviate the conditions that spawn tomorrow’s.

## II. Introduction

In the upheaval of the Arab Spring in 2011, as the Yemeni government was falling apart in the face of popular protests, dozens of masked men from al-Qaeda drove into the town of Jaar in southern Yemen. They introduced themselves as “supporters of Islamic law,” and told the townspeople they had come to restore order.

In taking control of Jaar, the goal of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was to “run people’s lives in accordance with Shariah law,” explained Adil al-Abab, AQAP’s chief cleric. But instead of focusing on dress codes and mosque attendance, al-Qaeda made its first priority to provide public services such as sewage and water systems. Jaar was one of the many areas of Yemen neglected by the government, and al-Qaeda played on the resentments of Jaar’s residents. “We hope that when the people see us meet their demands, they will accept the methodology of the mujahidin and accept the implementation of Shariah.”<sup>3</sup> Soon, AQAP’s propaganda featured glowing testimonials from locals who claimed their lives had improved under al-Qaeda’s rule.

AQAP’s experiment in governing did not last. But it was replicated across the Middle East and in parts of Africa where governments fail to provide for their citizens, enabling terrorist groups to step in to fill the void.

In 2015, amid another Yemeni government collapse and civil war, AQAP seized the port city of al-Mukalla, with more than 500,000 inhabitants. AQAP’s efforts to provide services were well received. “I prefer that al-Qaeda stay here, not for al-Mukalla to be liberated,” one resident told *Reuters* in early 2016. “The situation is stable, more than any ‘free’ part of Yemen.”<sup>4</sup>

In Iraq, ISIS similarly attempted to govern. It prosecuted even small debts and minor infractions, which the Iraqi government had generally ignored, as a way of gaining support among the population it ruled. “As far as justice was concerned,” according to one Iraqi citizen, “ISIS was better than the government.”<sup>5</sup>

**The gap between government failures and citizens’ aspirations, above all else, is what facilitates the spread of violent extremism.**

The gap between government failures and citizens’ aspirations, above all else, is what facilitates the spread of violent extremism. As this gap grows wider in the arc of fragile states from the Sahel, through the Horn of Africa, and into the Middle East, extremists will find fertile ground to reemerge and establish their own political order. As *New York Times* correspondent, Rukmini Callamachi, has said: “We should be more afraid of ISIS’ capacity to govern than we are of their fighters.”<sup>6</sup>

## From the 9/11 Commission to the Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States

In 2004, the 9/11 Commission foresaw the possibility for extremism to spread, mutate, and reemerge in new places. Thus, the Commission recommended a comprehensive strategy that would not only “attack terrorists and their organizations” and “protect against and prepare for terrorist attacks,” but just as critically “prevent the continued growth of Islamist terrorism.”<sup>7</sup> The Commission proposed a range of preventive measures, including promoting the rule of law and tolerance for opposing views, offering an agenda of opportunity, and building a comprehensive coalition of international partners.<sup>8</sup> The United States has effectively adopted two elements of this strategy—attacking terrorists and protecting the homeland—but made limited progress on prevention. **The time is ripe to adopt what the 9/11 Commission called “a preventive strategy that is as much, or more, political as it is military.”**<sup>9</sup>

At the time that the 9/11 Commission issued its recommendations, U.S. officials were rightly focused on imminent threats to the homeland, and there was little common or concrete understanding of how to go about preventing violent extremism. Since then, **the strategic environment has changed, requiring a new strategy for dealing with extremism, not only mitigating its damage but also addressing its underlying causes.**

That is precisely the task with which the U.S. Congress charged the United States Institute of Peace and this Task Force. Section 7080 of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2017* (H.R. 244), signed into law on May 5, 2017, calls for a “comprehensive plan to prevent the underlying causes of extremism in fragile states in the Sahel, Horn of Africa, and the Near East.”

## Roadmap of the Task Force’s Work

This interim report of the Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States explains why such a preventive strategy is needed and what it might entail. In 2019, the Task Force will propose a comprehensive preventive strategy to mitigate the conditions that give rise to violent extremism.

This report begins by reviewing the new strategic environment that has emerged since 9/11—the increased fragility, the evolution in extremist strategy, and the rise of strategic competition that plays out in fragile states—and argues for a new understanding of the threat posed by extremism in fragile states to U.S. interests. The threat is based not only on the possibility of attacks against the homeland but also on the ability of the United States to compete against its adversaries globally. The report then examines the conditions and actors that contribute to the emergence of extremism in fragile states. Finally, it considers what a preventive strategy might look like by identifying the strategy’s key objectives, highlighting the challenges for implementation, and reviewing evidence of what sorts of approaches can make a difference in fragile states. Ultimately, this report argues that the United States urgently needs a new strategy to strengthen fragile states and help them build resilience against extremism. Such a strategy would be difficult, but not impossible, to put in place. The current political winds are favorable to its adoption and successful implementation.

# III. The New Strategic Environment: Fragility, Extremism, and Competition

Extremism continues to plague the international community, just as it did on 9/11. But in the meantime, the strategic environment has changed dramatically. As a result, the threat of extremism today is different than it was seventeen years ago. **The Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel have become increasingly fragile. Extremists have spread across the region and their strategy has evolved to focus on establishing a new political order, which undermines existing states and weakens the international system. And America's rivals have seized on this disorder to grow their power and influence, often at the expense of fragile states.** At the same time, U.S. dependence on energy from these regions has lessened, and as our economic interests there have declined, so has our influence relative to other powers, especially China.

## An Increasingly Fragile Landscape

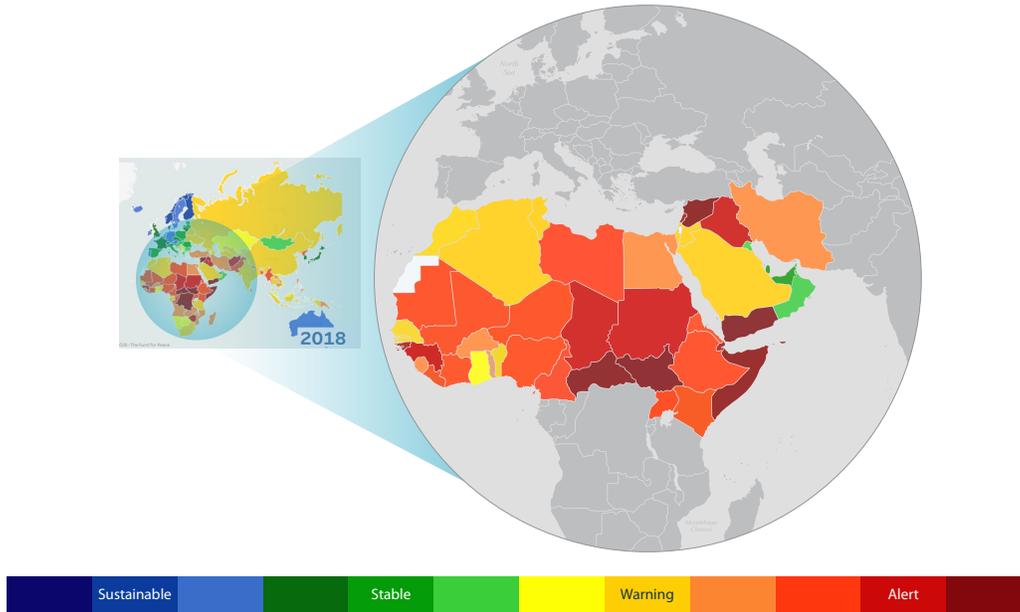
Each fragile state is fragile in its own way, but they all face significant governance and economic challenges. In fragile states, governments lack legitimacy in the eyes of citizens, and institutions struggle or fail to provide basic public goods—security, justice, and services—and to manage political conflicts peacefully.<sup>10</sup> Citizens have few if any means of redress. As a result, the risk of instability and conflict is heightened. Throughout the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, fragility is further exacerbated by growing youth populations.<sup>11</sup>

**In some states, governments lack the capacity to meet their citizens' needs. In many others, fragility is perpetuated by poor, undemocratic, or even predatory governance.** In such countries, ruling elites exploit the state and enrich themselves rather than serve citizens. They are willing to hold on to power by any means necessary: buying support through patronage, violently repressing opponents, and neglecting the rest. The resulting deep sense of political exclusion among citizens is aggravated by insecurity and shortages of economic opportunity.

Repeated shocks—including the global financial downturn, the Arab Spring, and recurring cycles of crippling droughts—have roiled the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel in the last decade. Few states have weathered these shocks well.

**Almost every country in these regions falls outside the “stable” range of the Fund for Peace’s Fragile States Index, occupying a spot somewhere between a “warning” and an “alert” level of state fragility** (see figure 1, “State Fragility in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, 2018”).<sup>12</sup> And fragility in all three regions has deepened over the past decade. Since 2006, 30 countries across these regions have become more fragile, while only 19 have seen their fragility reduced.<sup>13</sup> And the extent of these increases in fragility, on average, was greater than the decreases (see figure 2, “Changes in State Fragility, 2006–18”). Today, both the scale and the complexity of fragility are unprecedented.

Figure 1. State Fragility in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, 2018



Source: Fragile States Index at the Fund for Peace website, <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/> (accessed August 20, 2018).

Figure 2. Changes in State Fragility, 2006–18



Scores range from 0, least fragile, to 120, most fragile. Countries are arranged in descending order of increased fragility.

Source: Calculated from time series data in the Fragile States Index at the Fund for Peace website, <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/> (accessed August 20, 2018).

## From Safe Havens to Statebuilding: Extremist Strategy in Fragile States

Amid this ferment, extremists have launched their most daring onslaughts and made their greatest gains. **Fragile states are no longer mere safe havens but instead are the battlefields on which violent extremists hope to secure their political and ideological objectives.**

### Extremism and Violence

This Task Force is charged with addressing the underlying causes of extremism. Within the contemporary political environment, “extremism” generally refers to a wide range of absolutist and totalitarian ideologies that share the following three characteristics:

- Blaming injustices on existing social, moral, economic, or political institutions
- Denying the possibility of justice as long as these institutions remain in place
- Seeking to replace these institutions with a new political order governed by a doctrine that denies individual liberty and equal rights to citizens of different religious, ethnic, cultural, or economic backgrounds

“Extremists” believe in and advocate for such radical outcomes and seek to achieve them through political means. “Violent extremists” espouse, encourage, and perpetrate violence as they seek to create their extremist political order.

Many forms of violent extremism exist, but the most common form in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, and the one posing the most immediate threat to the United States today, espouses the creation of a radical Islamist state based on rigid, twisted, and false interpretations of sharia law.

### The Evolution of Extremist Strategies Post-9/11

Extremists have attempted to achieve their ideological objectives in different ways. Islamist militants in Algeria and Egypt waged bloody but unsuccessful insurgencies during the 1990s to overthrow those countries’ regimes. Osama bin Laden blamed their failure on Western support for secular Middle Eastern states. He created al-Qaeda to attack the United States and force it to withdraw from the region.<sup>14</sup>

After al-Qaeda was driven out of Afghanistan in 2001, a new strategic vision emerged. The influential 2004 strategic treatise, *The Management of Savagery*, called on al-Qaeda to exploit “the weakness of the ruling regime”<sup>15</sup> rather than try to overthrow entire states or attack the West. The treatise argued that extremists should concentrate on providing “food and medical treatment” in the areas they control, while preserving “security and justice, securing the borders,” and “setting up defensive fortifications.”<sup>16</sup>

**Fragile states, extremists realized, afforded a conducive environment for establishing experiments in governance and thereby demonstrating the validity of the extremist ideological agenda.**

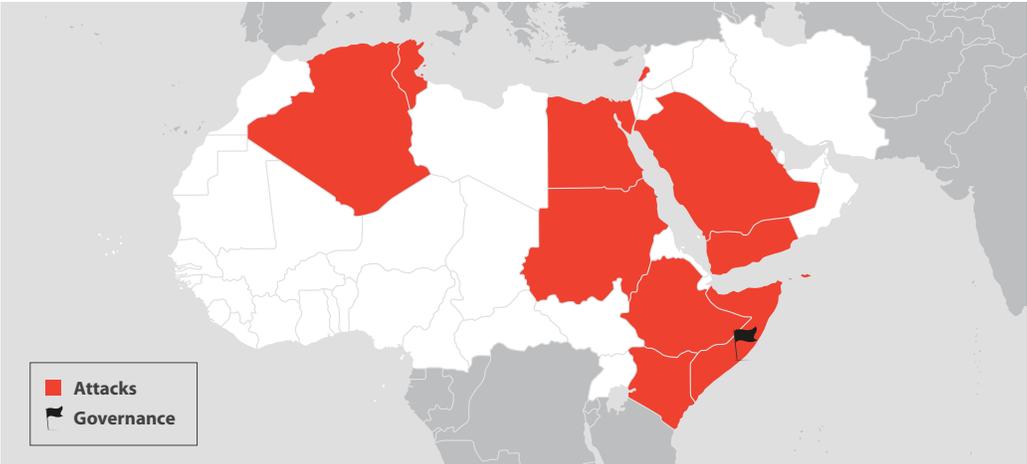
During the following decade, extremists began to execute this strategy. Al-Qaeda imposed harsh versions of Islamic law in Fallujah in 2004.<sup>17</sup> Extremists in Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Mali captured towns, established rudimentary governance structures, provided social services, and established makeshift Islamic courts, curtailing freedoms and imposing strict punishments.<sup>18</sup>

The most dramatic project of extremist statebuilding was the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The ISIS caliphate provided courts, religious schools, and social welfare services;<sup>19</sup> maintained public order;<sup>20</sup> and even collected hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes.<sup>21</sup>

### The Spread of Extremism

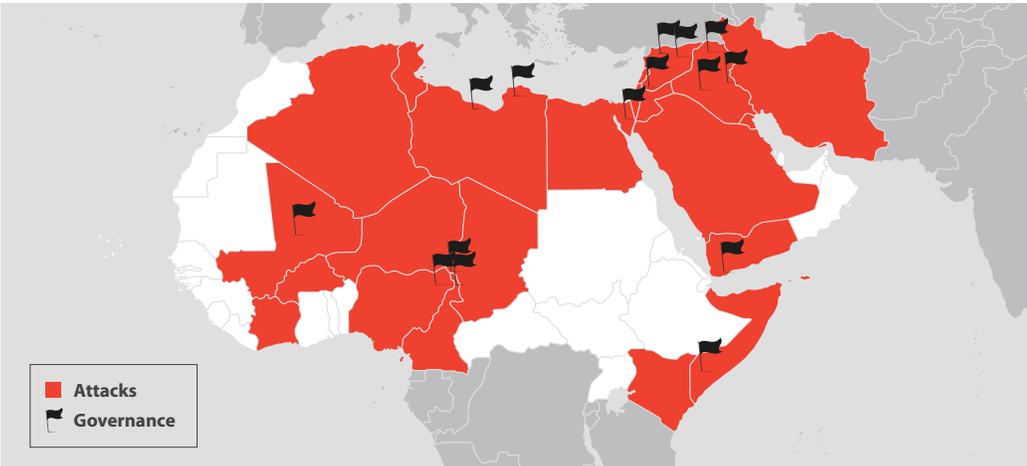
**Although the United States and its partners have crushed ISIS’s proto-state, a declaration of victory is premature.** Rather than accept defeat, ISIS extremists have warned that they are still in the fight.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, extremism is more widespread today than at any time before (see figure 3, “Extremist Attacks and Governance in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, 1996–2001” and figure 4, “Extremist Attacks and Governance in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, 2013–18”).

Figure 3. Extremist Attacks and Governance in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, 1996–2001



Source: Global Terrorism Database at the website of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/> (accessed August 20, 2018). Data on governance compiled from secondary sources.

Figure 4. Extremist Attacks and Governance in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, 2013–18



Source: Global Terrorism Database at the website of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/> (accessed August 20, 2018). Data on governance compiled from secondary sources.

ISIS is still present in Iraq and Syria<sup>23</sup> and has established affiliates in twelve countries.<sup>24</sup> And al-Qaeda has grown in strength in recent years, with a presence in Syria, Yemen, and now the Sahel.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the extremist focus on winning territory and establishing governance has blurred the line between terrorism, insurgency, civil war, and international conflict. Today, 77 percent of conflicts in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel have a violent extremist element, compared with 22 percent in 2001.<sup>26</sup> Extremists instigated violent insurgencies in the Sinai and Nigeria. In countries with a preexisting conflict—in Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen—violent extremist groups have exerted significant influence and sometimes gained territorial control.

**Extremists are primed to attempt governing again. They only need another political crisis, breakdown of social order, or nascent civil conflict to make their comeback. Due to the persistence of state fragility across the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, the risk of another extremist attempt to seize and govern territory remains high.**

## Strategic Competition in Fragile States

Global and regional powers are expanding their influence in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel, making the strategic environment in those regions more challenging. China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states often compete with each other and the United States in ways that make these regions more fragile and more susceptible to extremism.

### Great Power Competition

“China and Russia,” the president’s 2017 National Security Strategy asserts, “challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity.” This **great power competition extends to Africa and the Middle East.**

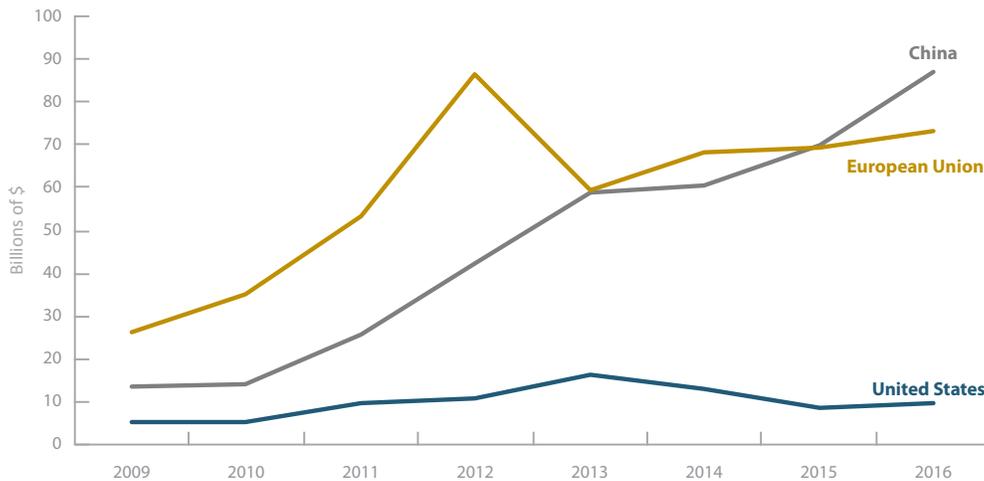
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China has built a large economic and diplomatic presence in Africa.<sup>27</sup> It is Africa’s largest single-country trade partner and its biggest creditor,<sup>28</sup> having lent more than \$100 billion to African governments and state enterprises since 2000.<sup>29</sup> This debt diplomacy is enhancing China’s political leverage. In Djibouti, for example, China owns the lion’s share of the country’s national debt and recently constructed a military base just miles away from the only permanent U.S. military base in Africa.<sup>30</sup> There is a serious risk that failure to repay loans will allow China to take control of significant

infrastructure, as it did in Sri Lanka<sup>31</sup> (see figure 5, “U.S., EU, and Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2009–16”).

In addition to boosting Beijing’s influence, **rising Chinese investments, when made irresponsibly, can also weaken already fragile states.** With few of the stipulations that are attached to Western investment and aid, such as transparency, Chinese assistance allows predatory governments to avoid reforms<sup>32</sup> and has been shown to have increased corruption.<sup>33</sup>

Figure 5. U.S., EU, and Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2009–16



Source: Calculated from publicly available data in the Coordinated Direct Investment Survey at the International Monetary Fund website, <http://data.imf.org/?sk=40313609-F037-48C1-84B1-E1F1CE54D6D5>.

Russia has relied principally on military assistance to expand its influence. In 2015, Moscow intervened in the Syrian conflict to prop up Bashar al-Assad’s brutal regime. Shortly thereafter, **regional U.S. partners, perhaps sensing a shift in the center of gravity, expanded their relations with Moscow.**<sup>34</sup> Egypt and Saudi Arabia have both signed large arms deals with Russia; Israel’s prime minister has traveled three times to Moscow, and only once to Washington, in the last two years; and Turkey has purchased a controversial Russian air defense system.

Although the United States leads in military assistance to the Middle East, in Africa, Moscow is by far the largest weapons supplier.<sup>35</sup> Russian arms are relatively affordable<sup>36</sup> and come with no human rights requirements. When the United States denied Nigeria’s request for Cobra attack helicopters because of human rights concerns, Russia stepped in and also agreed to train Nigerian security forces.<sup>37</sup>

### Regional Spillover

**Fragile states are also an arena for regional rivalries, particularly the long-simmering feud between Iranian-backed Shi’a and the Middle East’s looser Sunni bloc, led by Saudi Arabia.**

Iran has for almost forty years used political subversion and terrorism to export its revolutionary ideology and expand its influence. Since 2011, it has taken a more aggressive approach: intervening directly in the Syrian civil war; arming the Houthis in Yemen; and increasing its support for various Iraqi Shi’a militias and for Hezbollah.

Iran has extended its ambitions into Africa as well. It has recently shipped weapons through Djibouti and Sudan, provided arms to insurgents in Nigeria, and plotted terrorist attacks against Western targets in Kenya. In addition, Iran is now operating more than a hundred religious institutions in Africa.<sup>38</sup>

Saudi Arabia, which is feeling increasingly surrounded, is responding in kind. From 1982 to 2005, it spent \$75 billion to fund mosques, madrassas, and religious television channels.<sup>39</sup> Other countries have also contributed to the spread of extremist ideology. Qatar and Turkey have supported the Muslim Brotherhood, which other Sunni states view as on par with al-Qaeda, and Pakistan is complicit in funding radical madrassas.<sup>40</sup>

Saudi Arabia under Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman has taken a more muscular approach to its regional rivalries—for instance, intervening militarily in Yemen. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is similarly assertive. The Sunni bloc is fracturing, with the Saudis and Emiratis splitting from Qatar and, increasingly, Turkey.

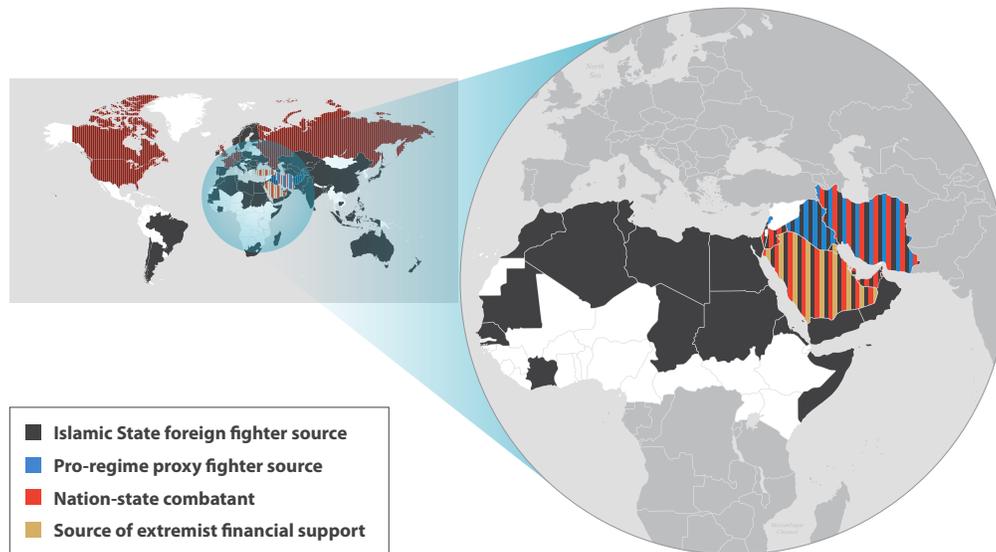
These **regional rivalries are exacerbating local conflicts and feeding tensions in fragile states. In Libya, Qatar supported Islamist militias, while the UAE backed competing factions.**<sup>41</sup> Foreign interventions in Syria by a wide array of actors deepened the country’s bloody civil war (see figure 6, “Foreign Involvement in the Syria Conflict”). Meanwhile,

Competition among great and regional powers is exacerbating fragility and extremism in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel.

Saudi, Kuwaiti, Qatari, and Emirati purchases of large tracts of agricultural land in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Tanzania have incentivized those governments to expropriate small landholders, creating a new group of aggrieved and marginalized citizens.<sup>42</sup>

Competition among great and regional powers is exacerbating fragility and extremism in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel.

Figure 6. Foreign Involvement in the Syria Conflict



Source: Data on foreign fighters is drawn from Soufan Group, “Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq” (2015), [http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG\\_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf](http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf) (accessed August 20, 2018); and Soufan Group, “Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees” (2017), <http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf> (accessed August 20, 2018). The source for data on pro-regime proxy fighters is Ali Alfoneh, “Tehran’s Shia Foreign Legions” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, January 30, 2018), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2018/01/30/tehran-s-shia-foreign-legions-pub-75387>. Data on extremist financial support is drawn from Yaya J. Fanusie and Alex Entz, “Al-Qaeda’s Branch in Syria: Financial Assessment” (Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Washington, DC, June 2017), [http://www.defenddemocracy.org/content/uploads/documents/CSIF\\_TFBB\\_AQIS.pdf](http://www.defenddemocracy.org/content/uploads/documents/CSIF_TFBB_AQIS.pdf).

## IV. The Threat to U.S. Interests from Extremism in Fragile States

Extremism continues to fester in the world’s fragile states and, just as the strategic landscape has shifted, so too has the threat posed by extremism to U.S. national security. **Terrorists still aspire to strike the United States, but the dangers of extremism to the United States now extend beyond the homeland.**

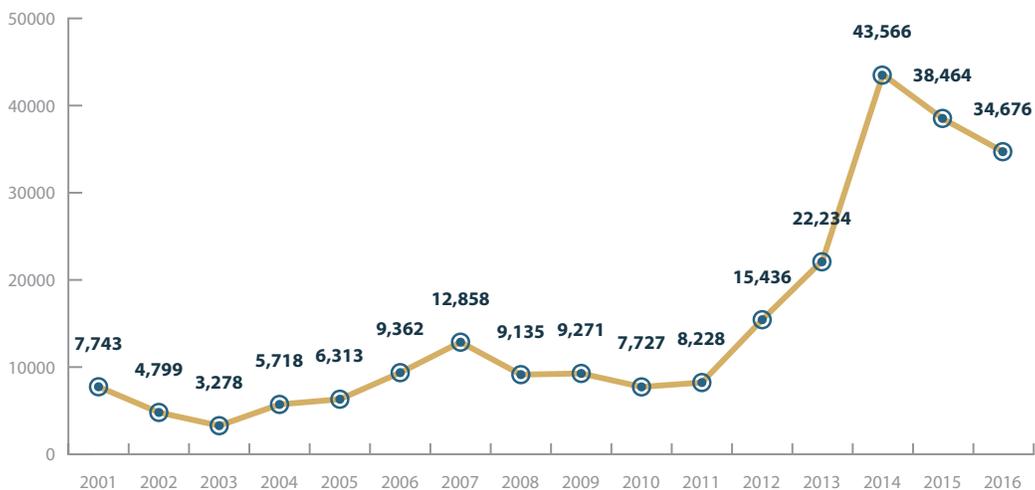
The United States confronts, as the Trump administration’s National Security Strategy puts it, “rivals [that] compete across political, economic, and military arenas . . . to shift regional balances of power in their favor.” U.S. global power rests in large measure on the stability of the open, rules-based international order, which facilitates trade, access to resources, and alliances and international partnerships that help protect our interests. The erosion of stability and order weakens the United States.

**We cannot compete effectively against China, Russia, or Iran as long as extremism fuels an arc of instability from the Sahel to the Middle East. Nor can we end the era of extremism inaugurated on 9/11 without confronting the ways that global and regional powers exploit and contribute to this threat.**

### The Threat to Americans

While a spectacular set of attacks like those conducted on 9/11 remains possible, extremists have shifted the emphasis of their strategy of violence to smaller, locally perpetrated attacks. Extremist enclaves in foreign cities provide launching pads for terrorist attacks, such as the ISIS attack on Paris in November 2015, which have killed Americans abroad. Attacks in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East have claimed fifty American lives overseas from 2014 to 2016.<sup>43</sup> Worldwide, the number of people killed in terrorist attacks has increased substantially since 2001 (see figure 7, “Worldwide Terrorist Attack Fatalities, 2001–16”).

Figure 7. Worldwide Terrorist Attack Fatalities, 2001–16



Source: Global Terrorism Database at the website of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/> (accessed August 20, 2018).

As ISIS demonstrated, **the creation of extremist rule can help facilitate terrorism in ways that hiding in a remote safe haven never could.** The self-proclaimed caliphate attracted sympathizers to join ISIS in Syria. It also inspired a “virtual caliphate” of radicalized followers around the world. Through social media and encrypted communications, **ISIS has encouraged attackers worldwide to harness lethal, low-tech weapons, such as trucks, cars, and knives. As long as extremist ideology and calls to violence continue to resonate with new recruits, we must expect them to devise and attempt new ways to harm us.**

## The Costs of Counterterrorism

By 2004, Osama bin Laden realized that it might be possible to draw the United States into a war of attrition on al-Qaeda’s turf. “All that we have to do,” he explained, “is to send two mujahedeen to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al Qaeda in order to make generals race there and cause America to suffer human, economic, and political losses without achieving anything of note.”<sup>44</sup> Since then, **extremists have tried to drive the United States to military, financial, and political exhaustion through the relentless grind of asymmetric warfare.**

And, indeed, the United States has paid a high price for wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere; the cost of post-9/11 wars is projected to total \$5.6 trillion by the end of fiscal year 2018.<sup>45</sup> **Even as the U.S. military has pivoted to lighter-footprint and therefore lower-cost counterterrorism operations, the political and strategic costs of seventeen years of ever-expanding war remain high.**

**The length and growing scope of the fight are driving Americans and their leaders to question the value of foreign military engagement.**

Nearly every country in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel receives some form of U.S. security assistance.<sup>46</sup> The United States has launched air or drone strikes in five of these forty-five countries<sup>47</sup> and deployed Special Operations forces to more than half of them since January 2017.<sup>48</sup> The United States spent \$175 billion on counterterrorism in 2017 (eleven times what it spent in 2001),<sup>49</sup> and the cost in terms of the lives of U.S. soldiers continues

to rise, with losses sustained recently in Yemen, Niger, and Somalia. **The length and growing scope of the fight are driving Americans and their leaders to question the value of foreign military engagement.** President Trump in April 2018 voiced support for pulling U.S. troops out of Syria, and the Pentagon is considering a sharp cut in Special Operations forces in Africa.<sup>50</sup>

## Chaos, Conflict, and Competition

“We are facing,” according to the U.S. Department of Defense’s 2018 National Defense Strategy, “increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory.” Military planners argue that “inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.”<sup>51</sup>

But extremism, and its persistence in fragile states, is not separate or distinct from the strategic competition the United States now confronts. While the threats to our national security from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea might be graver than from the likes of ISIS and al-Qaeda, extremism must be understood within the same strategic context.

**As extremism mutates and spreads, the resulting chaos and conflict drain U.S. power, weaken our allies, and provide openings for our adversaries. We cannot effectively compete with strategic rivals unless we reduce extremism.**

Conflicts in fragile states that pit authoritarian governments against extremist groups present the United States with difficult strategic choices: stay out of the fray and appear powerless; side with the rulers and compromise our democratic principles; or intervene to oust the extremists and be held responsible if stability does not quickly return. The United States has tried all three options and found that each one can be ineffective and erode its standing in the region and the wider world.

Furthermore, **the damage that extremists wreak in fragile states rarely stays there. As more states suffer violent outbreaks of extremism, chaos radiates outward and international order unravels further.** Conflicts reverse hard-won gains in economic development,<sup>52</sup> displace populations on a massive scale,<sup>53</sup> spread pandemics, encourage criminality, and precipitate humanitarian crises. The political consequences are also significant. Unprecedented refugee flows, and the strains of responding to them,<sup>54</sup> for example, have provoked significant splits within the European Union, weakening and dividing our allies.

Our adversaries at times have taken advantage of this instability, as Russia has done to extend its influence in the Middle East at the United States' expense. More often, they leave the fight against violent extremism to the United States and its allies as they pursue their economic interests, expand their diplomatic reach, and enhance their political leverage. **While extremism and the chaos and conflict it creates may not present an existential threat to the United States, it is a serious national security challenge in its own right and undermines our ability to compete against our adversaries.**

## The Political and Ideological Struggle

The competitions in which the United States is engaged are not only military in nature; they are political and ideological as well. As the 2017 National Security Strategy explains, we now confront “contests between those who favor repressive systems and those who favor free societies.” **The Russian and Chinese models are formidable competitors, but they are not our only ones; the totalitarian, intolerant ideology of extremism is just as dangerous.**

For citizens fed up with autocratic, kleptocratic, or incompetent government, the extremist ideal of an infallible state imbued with religious morals often offers one of the few options available. This sets up a cruelly self-sustaining struggle between autocracy and extremism. The more support extremists garner for their critique of the state, the more inclined the state is to repress them harshly. The harsher the state's repression, the more alienated citizens look to radical alternatives. And as extremists resort to violence, the vicious cycle of repression begins anew. The spread of extremist beliefs crowds out values of liberty, pluralism, and tolerance; degrades the social fabric; and foments support for totalitarianism.

**Societies trapped between fragility and extremism—with no viable alternatives for just, inclusive, and competent governance—will remain unstable, impoverished, and susceptible to conflict and foreign interference.**

**As long as extremism persists and extremist beliefs persuade and inspire more people than does the hope for tolerant and inclusive governance, the United States cannot expect to win the competition for peace and prosperity in the twenty-first century.**

## V. Conditions for Extremism

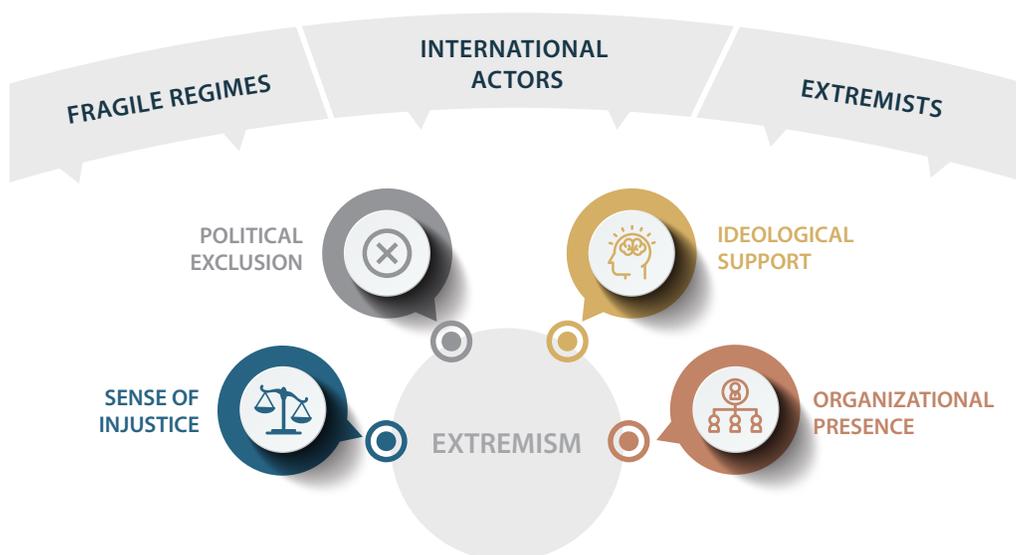
The new strategic environment demands a new U.S. strategy to reduce the ability of extremism to take root and spread in fragile states. This strategy requires a common understanding of why and how extremism emerges. Disagreements over the root causes of extremism have bedeviled U.S. and international policy; the time has come to move past them.

The Task Force has focused on the *conditions* that give rise to violent extremism in fragile states and the *actors* that reinforce and exploit these conditions. This focus conveys the importance of environmental factors in addition to individual motivations, looks beyond any single cause of extremism, and highlights the complex and dynamic interactions that make a society vulnerable to extremism.

### The Local Conditions for Extremism

Extremism is most likely to emerge in fragile states when the following conditions prevail: (1) citizens experience or see injustices perpetrated by the state; (2) significant segments of society are excluded from political processes; (3) extremist ideology gains support; and (4) extremist organizations establish a presence (see figure 8, “Conditions for Extremism”). These conditions are shaped by the local context and thus vary significantly from one context to another.

Figure 8. Conditions for Extremism



#### Sense of Injustice

In fragile states, reasons for frustration abound: poverty, unemployment, economic inequality and exclusion, violence, and conflict can be rampant. But these conditions alone do not push

individuals to join extremist movements.<sup>55</sup> Instead, **extremism is enabled by the belief that existing indignities and suffering are the direct result of poor, undemocratic, or predatory governance.** This sense of injustice aligns with a core tenet of extremist political ideology: rejection of the state in favor of a new political order.

In Iraq, ISIS gained prominence by presenting itself as the defender of Sunnis marginalized by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Shi'a-dominated government.<sup>56</sup> Abusive security forces are a major factor contributing to extremism among youth in Africa.<sup>57</sup>

### Political Exclusion

Even when trust in government is low, as it is throughout the Middle East and much of Africa, support for extremists remains limited.<sup>58</sup> **Extremism appeals less to citizens who can advocate for their interests and believe their appeals might be heeded than to citizens who believe they have no future opportunities.** Where governments extend basic services and economic opportunities (even if they are limited) to the entirety of their societies, and where citizens are free to engage in civic and political organizations, extremists struggle to attract followers.<sup>59</sup> In Tunisia's mining basin, labor unions helped build community resilience against extremism.<sup>60</sup> In Syria, ISIS struggled to penetrate regions such as Aleppo and Deraa that have traditions of vibrant civil society and political activism.<sup>61</sup>

When extremists provide the only viable option for change, they gain traction. Tunisian foreign fighters were more likely to come from parts of the country where labor unions were less embedded in the community. And Libya, a completely closed society under Muammar Gadhafi's rule, easily fell prey to violent extremism.

### Ideological Support

The move to extremist violence can be facilitated, or justified, by exposure to extremist ideology. **Extremist ideology, even when peaceful, can support the same objectives as violent extremist groups: rejection of the secular nation-state, hostility to Western values, and strict public morality.** Individuals in societies where (even nonviolent) extremism is prevalent are more likely to favor these objectives, particularly if people have been exposed to extremist ideology from a young age. They may also be relatively easily persuaded to pursue these objectives violently.

Egyptian foreign fighters, for example, tend to come from religious fundamentalist families.<sup>62</sup> Analysts have attributed Algeria's paroxysms of extremist violence in the 1990s to the influx, three decades earlier, of foreign teachers, many of whom held extreme religious views.<sup>63</sup>

### Organizational Presence

**The presence of an organizational infrastructure can make it easier for extremists to recruit, inspire, and direct followers.** Oftentimes, such organizational capacity comes from outside a country's borders. Iraqi extremists penetrated eastern Syria after the outbreak of the civil war in 2011, laying the foundations for ISIS's later emergence.<sup>64</sup> In Yemen, the arrival of Saudi fighters in 2009 led to the formation of AQAP.<sup>65</sup>

In other contexts, violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Somalia emerge organically, in response to local conditions, but their leadership might draw heavily on the brand, tactics, connections, or structures of a larger international organization.<sup>66</sup>

## Actors Reinforcing and Exploiting the Conditions for Extremism

These **conditions that fuel extremism in fragile states are reinforced and exploited by key actors: extremist groups, fragile regimes, and international actors.**

### Extremist Groups

**Once extremists establish a presence, they reinforce the dynamics that led to their initial emergence.** Their presence highlights the state's inability to provide security, their propaganda exposes citizens to extremist ideology, and their activity provokes harsh security responses, all of which stoke perceptions of injustice.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, extremists resort to intimidation and violence to carve out power and influence; for instance, they may target civil society activists.<sup>68</sup> And once extremists have established a foothold in one community, they can more easily spread to neighboring communities, regions, and countries.

### Fragile Regimes

**Predatory regimes in fragile states put their own survival and enrichment ahead of their people's needs. They cling to power through a combination of patronage, corruption, repression, and neglect.**

Patronage and corruption buy off the local elites and security forces. Repression helps keep a restive population in check temporarily, but it also fuels the sense of injustice that extremists exploit, particularly among prison inmates.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, when states criminalize dissent, their first targets are often the moderate religious voices and opposition movements that would otherwise serve as alternatives to extremism.

Fragile regimes may choose to neglect peripheral regions of the country, creating a void that extremism can fill. Where states fail to provide education, religious institutions, or a sense of shared national identity, extremists have room to spread their ideology.<sup>70</sup> Where the central government neglects security, extremists easily enter from abroad or emerge organically from within the neglected areas. And sometimes fragile states deliberately tolerate an extremist presence, either to counterbalance some other domestic or foreign threat or to attract international security assistance.<sup>71</sup> Peripheral, historically marginalized regions, such as northern Mali and western Yemen, are particularly vulnerable to extremists seeking to exploit grievances and broaden conflict.

### International Actors

Whether intentionally or inadvertently, both great and regional powers can contribute to the fertile environment for extremism and facilitate those that would exploit the environment. Engaged in strategic competitions, international actors may seek to secure fragile states' support, resources, or territory by offering them aid, investment, or weapons. Even when done for legitimate reasons, such as defeating terrorist networks, unconditional assistance can perpetuate if not bolster predatory regimes. **Too often, international actors pursue their own interests with little regard for the negative impact they have on societies vulnerable to extremism** (see figure 9, "How Actors Contribute to Extremism").

Figure 9. How Actors Contribute to Extremism

	 <b>SENSE OF INJUSTICE</b>	 <b>POLITICAL EXCLUSION</b>	 <b>IDEOLOGICAL SUPPORT</b>	 <b>ORGANIZATIONAL PRESENCE</b>
<b>EXTREMISTS</b>	Cast secular governments as illegitimate, provoke security forces abuse.	Threaten or intimidate nonextremist activists.	Use mosques, schools, and media to proselytize extremism.	Smuggle operatives and weapons into territory.
<b>FRAGILE REGIMES</b>	Govern by patronage, corruption, neglect, and/or repression.	Close political space, imprison nonextremist activists.	Fail to provide schools, leaving space for extremists. Weaken traditional religious authority.	Preside over ineffective or abusive security forces. Tolerate extremists.
<b>INTERNATIONAL ACTORS</b>	Give unconditional security aid and diplomatic cover to abusive regimes.	Prioritize security assistance over political concerns and conditions.	Propagate fundamentalist religious ideologies. Turn a blind eye to citizens funding extremism.	Pour arms into territory. Back unreliable proxies.

Regional powers can also help spread extremist ideology, either as a means of gaining influence in the societies of fragile states or to accommodate their own internal constituencies. Some Arab states have funded fundamentalist mosques, madrassas, textbooks, or media that reach fragile states. Others turn a blind eye to their own citizens' private contributions to extremist proselytizing and, at times, even to violent extremist groups.

**Occasionally, outside powers will back proxies in a fragile state's civil war. This intervention can exacerbate the conflict and create space and time for extremists to enter.**

It can also lead to foreign weapons making their way into the hands of extremists. The most egregious cases are states that, in pursuit of their political agendas, directly arm violent extremist groups, as Iran has done across the Middle East and into Africa.

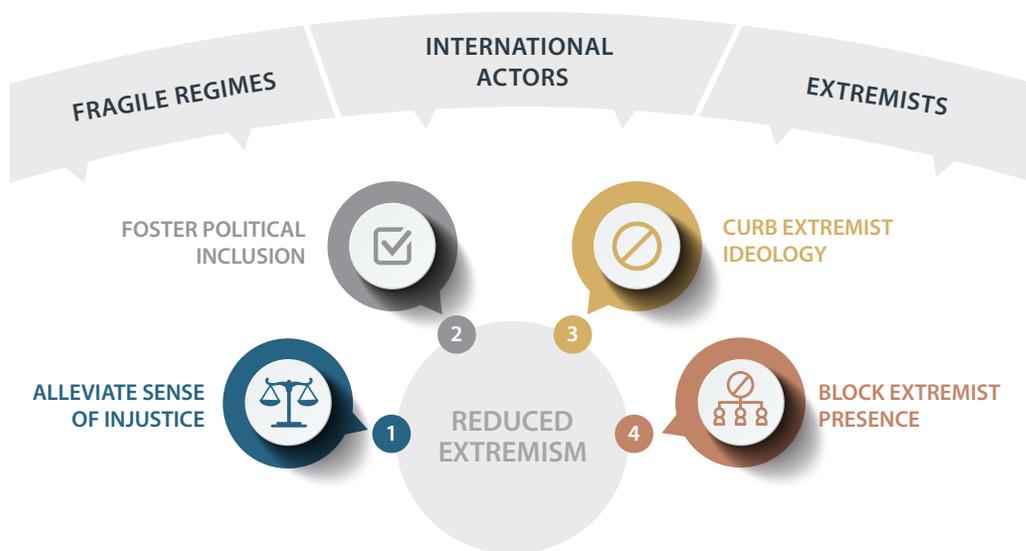
## VI. Elements of a Preventive Strategy

A comprehensive preventive strategy should target both the conditions and the actors that fuel violent extremism in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel. It should center on (1) alleviating real and perceived injustice; (2) fostering political inclusion; (3) curbing the spread and appeal of extremist ideology; and (4) containing the spread of extremist groups (see figure 10, “Objectives of a Preventive Strategy”).

This strategy should be grounded in humility about what the United States can accomplish. We cannot remake far-off societies with very different cultures and histories than our own. But we can make a difference. We can help vulnerable societies better resist extremism. This is a realistic and cost-effective approach to promoting U.S. security and international stability.

An effective strategy should support local, national, and international leaders and institutions that are already committed to building resilience in fragile states. At the same time, the strategy needs to limit the potential for predatory governance and strategic competition to undermine prevention efforts. And it requires a sustained commitment; we cannot solve the problem of extremism within the term of a single presidential administration.

Figure 10. Objectives of a Preventive Strategy



### Strategic Objectives: Addressing the Political Conditions for Extremism

The objectives of a preventive strategy are fundamentally political. In pursuing these objectives, the United States should integrate diplomacy, development, and defense in a coherent political strategy for building resilience in fragile states and societies. This strategy should include bottom-up approaches.

## Alleviating Real and Perceived Injustice

Targeted investments by external actors in fragile states—for example, funding to increase school attendance or build roads—are often not sufficient to stop individuals from joining extremist groups, because they are not linked to increasing society’s trust in its government.<sup>72</sup> Effective measures to reduce extremism should both make people’s lives better and demonstrate that their government is actively working to improve their lot. An integrated diplomacy-development-defense approach is needed because citizen grievances can stem from poor governance in any sector, from public health services to state security forces to the administration of justice.

For example, **programs that combine traditional development with a focus on political goals have shown some initial success.** In Somalia, vulnerable youth who received increased access to both secondary education and civic engagement opportunities were 64 percent less likely than nonengaged youth to show support for political violence.<sup>73</sup>

## Fostering Political Inclusion

Democratic institutions, particularly inclusive political processes, can reduce the appeal of violent extremists. **Nonviolent movements can facilitate grassroots civic participation. Dialogue between government and local civil society can make government policies more responsive,** particularly in highly volatile environments with little to no government transparency and accountability. The United States Institute of Peace, through its mediation efforts, has helped resolve and prevent communal warfare in Tikrit and other parts of Iraq, saving lives and reducing military costs.<sup>74</sup>

## Curbing the Spread and Appeal of Extremist Ideology

Protecting societies against extremism’s corrosive messages requires staunching their flow into fragile states. This can be done, for instance, through putting international pressure on governments to stop funding radical mosques, madrassas, and media channels. And efforts to stem the spread of poisonous messages should be combined with the dissemination of a potent antidote—a vibrant national identity. In Indonesia, where terrorist operations have declined since the early 2000s, two successive governments have prioritized building a sense of shared national identity in this multiethnic state.

**Initial assessments suggest that the most effective way to counter extremist messages is to involve local communities.** In Nigeria, locally led communications strategies that portrayed Boko Haram as corrupt and hypocritical appear to have dampened the group’s appeal.<sup>75</sup> Such approaches should include encouraging moderate local religious scholars who can rebut fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.

## Containing the Spread of Extremist Groups

Effective and just security is critical for protecting societies against extremist penetration. Security assistance should strengthen the ability of police to maintain order, particularly in vulnerable areas, and not merely target terrorist networks militarily. **Community policing, which involves establishing collaborative partnerships between law enforcement and citizens to address citizen security gaps, has proven effective in both increasing security and building trust in government institutions.**<sup>76</sup> Additionally, efforts to foster dialogue between security actors and communities, such as the United States Institute of Peace’s Justice and Security Dialogue initiative, can help restore trust in societies marred by abuse and conflict.

Military assistance should avoid undermining a longer-term preventive strategy, especially in countries with abusive security services.<sup>77</sup> To reduce its potentially harmful impacts, security assistance should be tied to improvement in governance. U.S. counterterrorism assistance to Indonesia has focused not on military training and advising but on domestic security forces, legal reforms, and prosecutions. This approach appears to have yielded better results in curbing terrorist operations than more traditional U.S. military assistance to the Philippines.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, providing security assistance also benefits the United States by increasing its influence among foreign militaries and, ideally, creating partners who can stand and fight with U.S. troops. The goal of U.S. policy should be to continue reaping these benefits, while avoiding the harm that security assistance can do.

## Challenges to Prevention

In implementing a preventive strategy, the United States will face four central challenges: lack of political will, weak international donor coordination, obstructive international actors, and disjointed U.S. efforts.

### Lack of Political Will

Progress will be limited and slow in fragile states where leaders lack the will to alleviate injustice, build more inclusive societies, and strengthen resilience to violent extremism. Ultimately, the impulse to embark on the path toward reform must come from within fragile states themselves. While some countries are on a positive trajectory, the Arab Spring has led to the rise of a “new authoritarianism” fueled by Arab leaders’ conviction that greater political openness is too dangerous in the context of rising extremism.<sup>79</sup> As discussed below, however, there are a range of steps that the United States can take to encourage long-term change, even in these difficult contexts.

### Weak International Donor Coordination

Too often, the priorities of the major international donors diverge and fail to align with country priorities. Donor investments in fragile states frequently ignore the sources of fragility and extremism. Instead, investors tend to focus either on short-term crisis response, such as life-saving humanitarian assistance, or on narrow, technical priorities, such as vaccination campaigns or the provision of individual weapons systems. These investments may help mitigate extremism in the short term but fail to build resilience over the longer term.

International frameworks such as the 2016 UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism provide a basis for closer international coordination.<sup>80</sup> Yet the application of this UN framework across countries in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel region remains spotty, at best. The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF),<sup>81</sup> established in 2014, seeks to pool international funding for local organizations to carry out counterextremism programs but does not provide a framework for aligning international engagement within individual fragile states.

### Obstructive International Actors

Strategic competition, the growth of nonstate actors, the spread of conflict, and rapidly shifting alliances in fragile states make extremism more difficult to stem. A variety of international actors and their fragile-state partners are behaving in ways that encourage the growth and tenacity of extremism while obstructing efforts to tackle it. For example, some

actors export extremism or give fragile states unconditional military assistance. Like fragile-state governments themselves, global and regional powers often view military support to fragile states as an effective bulwark against extremist violence and fail to appreciate the extent to which these approaches can fuel the next generation of extremists.

## Disjointed U.S. Efforts

U.S. policy tends to prioritize crisis response, often at the expense of longer-term U.S. interests. The timelines required to promote change in fragile states are far longer than U.S. government budget cycles. And despite the progress in improving the alignment of U.S. defense, diplomacy, and development in response to crises and in post-conflict situations, actions across the three sectors of government often pursue different objectives and can sometimes work at cross-purposes.

## What Can Work

**In putting a preventive strategy in place, three elements will be critical: local, national, and international partners; incentives to encourage reforms by fragile regimes and sideline spoilers; and greater unity of effort across the U.S. Government.**

### Partnerships for Prevention

The United States cannot build resilience to violent extremism alone. **America needs partners: local actors who can help strengthen their communities; national governments prepared to undertake the difficult political reforms necessary to build resilience to extremism; international donors committed to sharing the burden with the United States and working together for a common purpose; and private sector entities whose investments may spur opportunities in fragile states.**

#### *Local Leaders*

In most instances, violent extremism is a subnational phenomenon, affecting marginalized, peripheral regions of fragile states. Efforts to empower key actors and address the concerns of citizens in these regions can build resilience to fragility and extremism. Local communities should be directly involved in setting priorities and implementing programs, because community members best understand local needs and concerns. Influential religious leaders, and their messages of peace, as well as youth, women, and diaspora leaders, can contribute significantly to local resilience-building efforts.

The U.S.-funded National Resources Counter-insurgency Cell (NRCC) in Afghanistan, for example, recruited influential young men and offered them the opportunity to design and implement development projects tailored to their community's needs. The goal was to offer an alternative to the social status young men often gain by joining extremist groups. During the project period, there were no insurgency attacks on NRCC-sponsored projects or personnel, even as such attacks dramatically increased across the rest of Afghanistan.<sup>82</sup>

#### *Committed Governments in Fragile States*

The United States should seek to empower national governments that are committed to building resilience to violent extremism. Some governments in the Middle East and Africa are taking steps in the right direction. We should support them.

Jordan and Tunisia are instituting reforms to fight corruption and increase transparency.<sup>83</sup> Senegal's democratic progress helped shield the country from the encroachment of groups affiliated with al-Qaeda.<sup>84</sup> In Kenya, a multiethnic state affected by violent extremism, constitutional reforms are resulting in more inclusive governance.

A common lesson emerges from these experiences: national leaders committed to reform and development are critical to progress. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) provides a powerful model for successful development partnerships, which combine strong commitments by national leaders to reform or development with sustained donor commitments to support this progress. This model of investment has potential for fragile states.

### *International Donors*

Donors are already dedicating significant resources to fragile states in Africa and the Middle East. European countries are increasingly at the forefront of international efforts to confront extremism in the Sahel, investing \$2.4 billion in a multiyear stability and peace mechanism. The Gulf states are contributing to counterextremism programs as well. The United States could work with these partners to ensure that they invest in shared priorities.

International donors could coalesce around already existing frameworks and best practices. The Global Counterterrorism Forum was recently created to promote civilian cooperation and good practices to counter terrorism. The UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism called on member states to develop comprehensive national and local strategies. The UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 recognizes that access to justice and inclusive institutions are critical to promoting peace and prosperity. And the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States brought donors and self-identified fragile states together to work toward more inclusive and accountable governance. International donors need to do better in pursuing shared goals and using a common playbook. We know what to do but we are not doing it. The problem lies in a lack of will and leadership within the international community, not in a dearth of knowledge.

At the **May 2017 Riyadh Summit**, many Muslim-majority countries stepped up their partnership with the United States to curb violent extremism. The United States and Saudi Arabia joined with five Arab Gulf states to announce the creation of the Terrorist Financing Targeting Center and led twenty-one countries in establishing the Etidal Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology.

### *Private Sector*

Only the private sector can bring the economic opportunities needed to build resilience to violent extremism in fragile states over the long term. The United States should leverage its experience leading and participating in successful public-private partnerships, which can be a potent force for economic growth in fragile states.

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS' Relief (PEPFAR) kept over 11 million people from dying from HIV/AIDS by partnering with the private sector to provide life-saving antiretroviral drugs. PEPFAR leverages private sector brands, distribution networks, technology, and market-driven approaches. To date, PEPFAR has implemented sixteen sustained public-private partnerships, which require that the private sector match public sector resources both monetarily and in-kind.<sup>85</sup>

The private sector can also help make societies more resistant to extremism. America Abroad Media, for example, brings Hollywood talent to the Middle East to help local media produce more compelling programming that promotes civic values. Technology companies, on whose platforms extremist ideology spreads, have a responsibility and interest in protecting communities from these toxic influences and helping amplify local voices of tolerance. Google's Redirect Method initiative is an example of the private sector taking a step in the right direction.

## Shaping Incentives

**In places where constructive partners are difficult to find, the United States should be prepared to push unwilling countries to reform and limit the damage done by international spoilers.**

### *Incentivizing Reform*

Fragile states are unlikely to build deep resilience to extremism without a strong political commitment by their governments to invest in reaching development goals, make budgets more transparent, invite citizen input in setting the agenda, and foster trust between government and marginalized communities. The United States should use a mix of structured incentives and coercive measures to move fragile states to adopt such reforms.

As noted above, the MCC provides such incentives. It sets clear criteria for eligibility, including just governance. The prospect of attracting greater private investment as a result of attaining MCC eligibility provides added incentive for governments to reform. In Liberia, Niger, and Sierra Leone, for example, governments have instituted anticorruption measures to become eligible for MCC assistance. For countries that meet MCC eligibility, the United States commits to providing sustained assistance for an agenda jointly owned by the United States and each recipient government.

Foreign assistance or trade agreements may provide incentives to fragile states, while the threat of withdrawing such assistance and trade may add pressure. Diplomatic coalitions, including the Global Coalition Against Daesh and the Group of Friends for Preventing Violent Extremism, can coordinate incentives and pressure to change the behavior of fragile states.

The United States can also draw on its substantial experience in supporting democratic reform in closed political spaces. Even in countries with authoritarian governments, assistance to civil society can lay the groundwork for inclusive and accountable governance.

**The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)** pioneered the use of compacts to improve development outcomes in poor countries. MCC sets clear criteria for eligibility and invests in selected countries' priorities for economic growth. The rigorous selection process and support for country-led solutions create strong incentives for countries to govern justly, encourage economic freedom, and invest in their people.

### *Coercing Spoilers*

Coercive diplomacy—with both carrots and sticks—is needed as part of the toolkit to rein in spoilers among both fragile states and international actors. While coercive diplomacy is by no means always decisive, it can be effective in some cases, as it was in persuading Gadhafi to give up Libya's weapons of mass destruction program.

If the United States and its partners can show a credible plan that offers the prospect of reducing state fragility, extremism, and terrorist violence, key actors, particularly international actors, will be more likely to bring their own policies into alignment with those efforts. In Afghanistan, for example, such alignment started to fray when American-led efforts at bringing peace to the country appeared to founder.

## Uniting U.S. Government Efforts

**Given the complexity of reducing violent extremism, greater unity of U.S. efforts is needed to maximize the impact of diplomacy, development, and defense,** including to better align short-term counterterrorism efforts with the long-term investments needed to strengthen fragile states against extremism.

Coordinated U.S. approaches have shown positive results. Over more than a decade and a half, the United States built a strong, multifaceted partnership with Colombia, based on coordinated civil-military engagement, that helped weaken the FARC insurgency and put the country on a road to peace. And coordinated U.S. interagency engagement around presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010–11 and Kenya in 2013 helped prevent outbreaks of large-scale violence.

In fast-paced and complex strategic environments in fragile states, new capabilities are needed to make the federal bureaucracy more nimble and responsive to local conditions. These capabilities should include mechanisms for assessing and flagging conditions conducive to extremism, expedited procurement processes, expeditionary diplomacy and development capacity, and adequate staff training on fragility and extremism.

To ensure the bureaucracy stays on track toward achieving prevention goals, a robust interagency oversight mechanism is needed. This mechanism should ensure buy-in among all involved agencies for a common plan and set clear and realistic metrics at the outset for success on the ground. The common plan should provide clear direction while giving agencies sufficient flexibility to adapt to local conditions and take risks in highly volatile, fragile contexts, where progress is rarely if ever linear. There should also be a process of continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of programs designed in the field; those that are not working should be scrapped, while those that do work should be studied and their lessons incorporated into future planning. Only by taking risks, experimenting, identifying what works and what does not, and learning from both can we develop the effective tools we need to deal with the conditions that foster extremism in fragile states.

**A stronger partnership between the executive and legislative branches is critical to give on-the-ground diplomats and aid workers the latitude to respond to local needs while maintaining accountability to the taxpayers.** Both the Millennium Challenge Act (2003) and the Freedom Support Act (1992) provided models for combining flexibility with Congressional oversight.

**All U.S. efforts to reduce fragility and extremism should be adapted to the local context. They should allow on-the-ground personnel to experiment and take risks, provided that program results are rigorously evaluated to enable personnel to learn from mistakes and develop new, more effective programs to build resilience to extremism** in fragile states.

**The Stabilization Assistance Review** in 2018 produced *A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas*, which commits the State Department, USAID, and the Defense Department to improve coordination. The framework puts forward a shared theory of change, defining “stabilization” as an inherently political endeavor that requires aligning diplomacy, foreign assistance, and defense. It sets the stage for clearer assignments of agency roles and responsibilities, including civilian-led stabilization teams, and for more effective international burden sharing.

## Why Now?

A new, comprehensive strategy for reducing extremism in fragile states can bring coherence to and amplify existing U.S. and international initiatives while harnessing the favorable political winds. Three dynamics point in the right direction.

First, **the U.S. Government has already begun to work toward more unified, interagency approaches to this long-term fight.** The 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review, for example, clarified how the State Department, USAID, and the Defense Department can coordinate more effectively in efforts to stabilize conflict-affected areas.<sup>86</sup>

Second, **bipartisan agreement is emerging in Congress on the need to change how the United States engages in fragile states.** The Global Fragility and Violence Reduction Act of 2018 seeks to improve U.S. capacity to address the causes of violence, conflict, and fragility. The Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act of 2018 prioritizes mobilizing private capital for development in fragile states. Guidance in the FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act applies standards of transparency, efficiency, and results to U.S. security assistance.

Third, **new opportunities have arisen for burden sharing and international collaboration.** For example, France is conducting counterterrorism operations and spearheading new development investments in Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, and Niger.<sup>87</sup> The Saudi government established the Etidal Center at the 2017 Riyadh summit to counter violent extremist messaging. And the World Bank recently committed \$14.9 billion for fragile states. These moves demonstrate interest within the international community to do more to strengthen fragile states; the United States can marshal this interest into joint endeavors.

## VII. Conclusion

The defeat of ISIS is likely to drive extremists to seek new opportunities in the fragile states of the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel. As Secretary of Defense James Mattis told the Global Coalition Against Daesh, “Even without a physical caliphate, ISIS remains a threat to stability in the recently liberated areas, as well as in our homelands.”<sup>88</sup> **The United States should move quickly both to consolidate its gains against ISIS before ISIS has a chance to reemerge and to prevent violent extremism from taking root in new territory.** There is strong bipartisan agreement on the need to mitigate the risk of ISIS’s reemergence.

**Key elements of a preventive strategy, particularly improvements in governance by fragile states and opportunities for their citizens to enjoy a brighter future, will require sustained efforts to produce results.** While the United States and its local and international partners undertake these efforts, violent extremists will not sit still but instead will be working hard to exploit state fragility, seize territory, and advance extremist governance. **For a preventive strategy to succeed, it will need to outpace attempts by extremist groups to undermine fragile states. The time to put a preventive strategy in place is now.**

# Appendix

The Task Force consulted with the following U.S. Government agencies, international organizations, foreign governments, nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, and private sector entities:

## *U.S. Government Agencies*

Millennium Challenge Corporation  
National Security Council  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
U.S. Department of Defense  
U.S. Department of State

## *International Organizations*

Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development  
New Deal Secretariat  
United Nations Development Programme  
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
World Bank Group

## *Foreign Governments*

European External Action Service  
Qatar Embassy in Washington, DC  
Somalia Senate Foreign Affairs Committee  
Swedish Foreign Ministry

*The Task Force will consult more extensively with foreign governments as it prepares policy recommendations for its final report.*

## *Nongovernmental Organizations*

Alliance for Peacebuilding  
America Abroad Media  
American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research  
The Atlantic  
Bipartisan Policy Center  
Brookings Institution  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace  
Center for Global Development  
Center for International Development and Conflict Management  
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation  
Coexist Foundation  
Council on Foreign Relations  
East-West Center  
Eurasia Group  
Foundation for Defense of Democracies  
Foundation for Inclusion  
German Marshall Fund of the United States  
Global Engagement Center  
Hudson Institute  
Institute for Global Change  
Institute for the Study of War  
InterAction  
International Crisis Group  
International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding  
International Youth Foundation  
Jewish Policy Center  
Mercy Corps International  
Middle East Institute  
Muflehun  
National Counterterrorism Center  
Norwegian Defense Research Establishment  
ONE Campaign  
Overseas Development Institute  
Peace Direct  
Rockefeller Foundation  
Stimson Center  
Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy  
Washington Institute for Near East Policy  
Wilson Center  
World Organization for Resource Development and Education  
World Peace Foundation  
World Vision

## *Academia*

American University  
Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University  
Columbia University  
Combating Terrorism Center, West Point  
ETH Zurich  
Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme  
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University  
George Washington University  
Georgetown University  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University  
Princeton University

## *Private Sector*

Albright Stonebridge Group  
BAE Systems, Inc.  
Beacon Global Strategies, LLC  
Chertoff Group  
Citibank  
Ethan Allen, Inc.  
GE Power  
MSNBC Cable L.L.C.  
RiceHadleyGates, LLC  
Team 3i LLC

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