

Implementing the Global Fragility Act: Recommendations to the Biden-Harris Administration

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Passed with strong bipartisan support in December 2019, the Global Fragility Act (GFA) reorients U.S. foreign policy and assistance to treat the root causes of violence that have displaced nearly 80 million people worldwide. COVID-19 has exacerbated many factors underlying global instability, leaving more communities vulnerable to violence and conflict. [Initial Mercy Corps analysis](#) shows how the pandemic is fraying trust, proliferating disinformation, expanding the influence of armed and violent extremist groups, and increasing resource competition. The GFA can help address these worsening challenges by ensuring that U.S. diplomatic, development, and defense agencies collaborate to reduce violence in at least five high-priority, fragile countries over a 10-year period.

Recommendations to ensure successful GFA implementation

In order to achieve the full promise of the GFA in preventing and mitigating violence globally, Mercy Corps offers these recommendations to guide the early actions of the Biden-Harris Administration:

- 1. Finalize and release the Global Fragility Strategy, including the list of priority countries:** The Biden-Harris administration should review, revise and reaffirm the [U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability](#), released on December 18. Although this strategy provides an important foundation, it did not meet all of the statutory requirements of the GFA, most notably by omitting the priority countries. The next administration should build on and finalize this strategy, including by selecting priority countries, within its first 100 days. The strategy should emphasize how corruption, security sector abuse, and violence against civilians worsen state fragility. It should offer specific options for incentivizing good governance and repairing the social contract between states and the communities they are meant to serve, including by assisting governments in responding equitably to the effects of COVID-19.
- 2. Elevate Leadership:** The Global Fragility Act calls for a whole-of-government strategy and a multisectoral approach. Instead of assigning implementation responsibilities to one office or bureau within each agency, the Administration should designate a Deputy or Under Secretary-level official as the GFA coordinator in each Department, who will chair a GFA Task Force of relevant assistant secretaries. This internal structure will foster strong collaboration across bureaus and ensure better alignment of diplomatic and programmatic work.

3. **Build Multilateral Support:** The Administration should launch and seek contributions for the Multi-Donor Global Fragility Fund, leveraging the \$25 million appropriated in the FY21 budget. This fund could be announced as part of the Summit for Democracy the President-elect has committed to hosting during his first year in office. To keep the Fund's start-up timeline and administrative costs from delaying implementation, the Administration should consider housing it in an existing platform, such as the [Global Community Engagement & Resilience Fund](#). The new Administration can use the Fund to raise contributions from government, private sector, and philanthropic partners and to better align governments' diplomatic and development activities in fragile states as called for in the United Nations and World Bank [Pathways for Peace](#) report.

4. **Consult with Experts and Local Communities:** The GFA mandates consultations to guide the development of the Global Fragility Strategy, and the Administration should organize a thorough, transparent consultation process that includes a written component. In addition, Congress made clear its intent that the GFA "address the long-term underlying causes of fragility and violence through participatory, locally led programs..." The Administration should articulate how U.S. government agencies plan to identify, partner, and seek input and evaluation from the communities where the strategy activities take place. This process must include deeply engaging local communities in mapping changing conflict dynamics due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it should draw on cutting-edge approaches to community-led analysis.

5. **Prioritize research and learning:** The U.S. government should form a partnership with research entities to develop a comprehensive learning agenda for all GFA assistance and diplomatic activities. Across the priority countries, the U.S. government must go beyond traditional aid program monitoring and evaluation and support larger-scale and more rigorous research studies to document and measure how diplomatic, development, and defense efforts work in tandem in differing contexts to understand solutions to violence. A comprehensive research approach must include multiple methods, including randomized controlled trials, process-tracing case studies, and participatory research methods, to build evidence to resolve key questions: What types of programs are effective at strengthening state-society relations and building community resilience to the spread of violent extremism? What types of programmatic adaptations are necessary in light of changing conflict dynamics due to the COVID-19 pandemic? How do individual programs and diplomatic efforts add up to cumulative effects on violence prevention within countries?

Which U.S. Agencies will Implement the GFA?

- **The Department of State (DOS)** is the lead agency and is responsible for advancing diplomatic and political efforts, drafting and executing strategy implementation, and guiding security efforts.
- **The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)** is tasked with prevention program oversight and is the lead for development, humanitarian, and non-security programs.

- **The Department of Defense (DOD)** may support the activities of the civilian agencies through joint formulation and with the concurrence of the Secretary of State.
- **Other relevant Federal agencies, including the Department of the Treasury**, may support GFA implementation with the concurrence of the Secretary of State and USAID Administrator.

What is the timeline and status of GFA implementation?

1. Global Fragility Strategy: The GFA requires the President to submit to Congress a report detailing the Global Fragility Strategy (GFS), laying out how relevant U.S. government departments, agencies, and officials will achieve this strategy **within 270 days** after enactment. On December 18, the U.S. government released the [U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability](#).

2. Country-Specific Plans: Within one year after the date of the enactment of the GFA, the President, along with relevant Federal agencies and departments, must submit to Congress a detailed 10-year strategy to prevent and address violence in **at least five priority countries**. This strategy must explain why each country was selected as a priority and include: a baseline analysis for each respective country, descriptions and timeline of goals and objectives, interagency plans that involve local government and civil society actors, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and descriptions of how such actions will strengthen U.S. partnerships with foreign governments, donors, multilateral organizations, and the private sector. Given the delay in development of the Global Fragility Strategy, the U.S. government has not yet met this deadline.

3. Biennial Reports: Within two years after the GFS and priority country selections, the President shall provide to Congress a *biennial report* on the status of the GFA implementation. These reports must include descriptions of steps to incorporate the GFS into any relevant, existing country and regional plans, accountings of all funding received and obligated to each country strategy, and progress in achieving specific targets, metrics, and indicators.

How will the GFA be funded?

The GFA specifies the creation of three funds to resource the GFA Strategy:

1. **Prevention and Stabilization Fund:** Aims to support prevention of violence as well as stabilization of conflict-affected areas. It authorizes \$200 million for each of the fiscal years 2020 through 2024. Congress appropriated \$200 million and \$100 million to this Fund in fiscal years 2020 and 2021, respectively.
2. **Complex Crisis Fund:** Supports programs to prevent or respond to emerging or unforeseen conflicts. It authorizes \$30 million for each of the fiscal years 2020 through 2024. Congress appropriated \$30 million to this Fund in both fiscal years 2020 and 2021.

3. **Multi-Donor Global Fragility Fund:** Leverages both public and private contributions to foster multilateral coordination and ensure effective programming and burden sharing. Congress provided authorization to direct up to \$25 million from the Prevention and Stabilization Fund to launch this Fund in fiscal year 2021.