



UNITED STATES STRATEGY TO PREVENT CONFLICT AND PROMOTE STABILITY- 2020

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The US Department of State released a report titled, ‘US Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability,’¹ on December 18, 2020 that sets forth a framework to stabilize the conflict-affected areas, prevent conflicts and address global fragility by following the course of action it set in the Global Fragility Act (GFA) of 2019.²

The report also takes its premise from the National Security Strategy that came out in 2017³ during President Trump's term and talks about the shared vision of US and its allies. The overseeing of GFA implementation is led by the State Department in close collaboration with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of Defense. The purpose of the new strategy is to develop and structure a wholesome approach by the government and its different departments and agencies in order to primarily change the way Washington plans to prevent fragility and stabilize existing conflicts.

The document in itself is the first that the US has produced as a report, to chalk a 10-year strategy that addresses conflict prevention and post-conflict stabilization in fragile states. Through this document, Washington intends to overhaul its current approach to conflict and its prevention as well as post-conflict stabilization around the world. The desire to do so grew out of the recognition in Washington that large scale stabilization efforts in both financial terms and otherwise made by

¹ US Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability , US Department of State, December 2020, <https://www.state.gov/stability-strategy/>

² S.727 - Global Fragility Act of 2019, 116th Congress (2019-2020), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/727>

³ National Security Strategy, Department of State, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

the US after 9/11, have cost billions of dollars in taxpayers' money to the US but have failed to produce intended results.

The Assistant Secretary of State at the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations and the Director of Foreign Assistance are responsible to lead and oversee progress on the GFA at the State Department. At USAID front, the assistant to the administrator at the agency's new Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization is held responsible for the oversight. The report is a requirement under the US GFA legislation and was originally due in September of 2020 but got delayed and a summary of the report was issued instead. The September summary fell short on fulfilling the legal requirements that were earmarked in the GFA and instead was released as a 6-pager summary of the work that the outgoing Trump administration had done.⁴

In the December 2020 report, the State Department along with other relevant agencies has identified four major priority areas that are necessary to achieve the set goals. The four major areas through which the United States can advance its security have been identified as: Prevention, Stabilization, Partnerships and Management. It entails that the US security and prosperity depends on peace, self-reliance, economic and security partnerships, and breaking of the costly cycle of conflict and instability.

The strategy comes as a requirement to the 2019 GFA. The Act itself lays the foundation for the report. It outlines four priority strategies;⁵ firstly, to anticipate and prevent violence before it is too late; second, to achieve locally-driven political solutions by focusing on stabilization through locally driven solutions to violence; third, to promote partnerships by collaboration and engagement between the US and other nations to foster stability; and fourth, by assisting both economic and governmental institutions and by enabling an effective response from the US to cultivate diverse staff through recruitment and training with the ability to address fragile states and by including conflict risk assessments.

The report emphasizes that the underlined principles can be achieved at different levels through bilateral, multilateral, as well as public-private level partnerships. After defining its priority areas, the report lays out a methodical process to monitor the policy outcomes. The document architects a process through which Washington will be able to designate the roles and responsibilities of certain agencies. It will further include the decision making process outlining staffing and resource requirements and how it will be integrated effectively into the existing US development, diplomatic, and defense structure.

⁴ Report to Congress Pursuant to Section 504(c) of the Global Fragility Act, Department of State, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5db70e83fc0a966cf4cc42ea/t/5f620c84c456f529e2da40c2/1600261252894/Global+Fragility+Act+Report+-+9.15.2020.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

The US is remarkably good at pushing reports, evaluations and strategizing its future trends and this new report fulfils all that. However, the report that has been developed as a result of consultations between US government departments and with the help of multilateral agencies is unclear and vague on many fronts including the role of other countries or regional stakeholders. While the report highlights issues imperative to be addressed, it lacks the right level of action. It constructs a decade long strategy architecture which can lose its importance with the changing geo-political and geo-strategic order. Majority of the conflicts around the world are either led by the US itself or if not, Washington remains a party to the conflict directly or indirectly. To make the amendments and changes the US suggests and professes in the report, it has to start by putting its own house in order. Unfortunately, while the US agencies are good at releasing reports and underlining areas of concern by placing the right words, there are chances of limited to no follow-ups. The Trump administration failed to submit the first report on time.

The success of the strategy identified in the report rests with how the new administration deals with the determined principles and the importance it will place on conflict resolution and stabilization in conflict areas. Only through its actions and not words the US can showcase its commitment to sustain a consultative and collaborative approach that it professes in the report.