

TODA PEACE INSTITUTE – INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM
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Good morning. My name is Joe Hewitt. I am the Vice President for Policy, Learning and Strategy at the United States Institute of Peace.

Before I begin, I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to Kevin Clements and his team for the very kind invitation to join this discussion today.

Let me begin by introducing myself. For more than 20 years, I have dedicated myself professionally to better understand the causes and consequences of violent conflict so that it might be possible to do something to prevent it. I am trained as a political scientist. I started my career as a traditional academic, specializing in developing quantitative models that estimated future conflict risks for fragile states.

After doing that for a few years, I became more and more interested in making academic research on conflict analysis useful for policymakers. In 2005, I joined a policy research center at the University of Maryland that worked closely with the U.S. Agency for International Development. In 2011, USAID made me an offer to join the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation to direct its analytic activities supporting the Agency's efforts in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Let me say a bit more about my years at USAID because this was a really exciting time to be working on issues of conflict and fragility at a large development agency. Starting in 2011, global development donors came to consensus about principles for working in fragile states, culminating in the

New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. The 2011 World Development Report brought together the most recent evidence on conflict and fragility, making a powerful case that development is impossible in fragile states without first addressing the causes of fragility. Meanwhile, at USAID, my team made progress institutionalizing some practices for more effective development in fragile states. Then, in 2015, with the inclusion of Goal 16 among the Sustainable Development Goals, it seemed to me that a remarkable consensus had formed about the centrality of promoting peaceful and inclusive states.

I moved on to the U.S. Institute of Peace late last year, about a month before the U.S. Presidential election, eager to help lead the Institute by building on this new consensus to continue to strengthen our knowledge and practice about peacebuilding in fragile states.

And then the election happened, which led all of us to wonder how the new political climate might affect our work.

So, what does the election result mean for this consensus that I've been talking about?

An election result doesn't change the evidence base.

That evidence is clear: Nearly all outbreaks of violent intra-state conflict can be traced back to an absence or breakdown of the social contract between people and their government. That's how USIP and many other development agencies define *fragility*.

For this reason, USIP's own theory of change is based on aligning its own unique capacities toward achieving peacebuilding objectives that have

clear potential to help repair broken state-society relationships. And this is not going to change, despite the new political climate we find ourselves in.

I think one of the biggest changes we are likely to see with respect to policy on addressing fragile states will be increased emphasis on countering violent extremism.

From what we have all seen and heard, we can be confident that countering violent extremism will be a key priority for the new administration.

The risk of exclusive focus on violent extremist organizations is that we securitize the problem. I worry that an exclusive reliance on military tools to address the immediate threats will leave us without any long-term solutions to the problem.

We cannot afford to overlook the need to work on the broader drivers that feed violent extremism in the first place (marginalization of identity groups, absence of inclusive economic opportunity, non-accountable and corrupt governing institutions, and the need for sustained reconciliation processes). If we don't succeed with these broader goals in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, and on and on -- we'll continue to face new waves of violent extremism into the distant future.

So, how then can the new administration be encouraged to focus on the long-term work needed to address fragility? The moral challenge posed by fragile states might be a driving force for this.

Right now, four of the most fragile states in the world—Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen and north eastern Nigeria—are lurching into famine conditions, putting 20 million people at risk of dying of starvation within six months. In each of these cases, broken social contracts and violence loom large as drivers of such pervasive food insecurity.

Here's the point. From a moral standpoint, the human suffering engendered by these potential famines places an unavoidable responsibility on the international community, including the United States, to respond. Whether fragility compounds the spread of a pandemic disease, or contributes to famine, or enables the conditions for armed violence, the devastating toll on human life demands a remedy. To be clear, the moral challenge of fragility extends beyond the humanitarian response to crises.

We now know that these crises emerge from fragile settings not because of bad luck, but because of structural attributes that can be fixed with smarter policy and practice. Knowing that implies that the moral imperative to address fragility extends to responding to its root causes, not just to the crises and human suffering that are often the consequence. It's this moral imperative that gives me some hope that the challenge of fragile states will remain a focus for the new U.S. administration and the broader international community.

I'll close with this. This is a time for those who work in the peacebuilding field to be assertive, not defensive. The consensus I described earlier provides a roadmap for how we take our work forward to achieve lasting results in conflict-affected environments. We should harness ever-improving tools for measuring our results with rigor so that we can continue

to make a stronger and stronger case that building peace is practical and cost-effective.

Nobody gets into the peacebuilding field because the work is easy, because the travel is luxurious, or because the pay is great. We do this because we are convinced that our work can make a difference. With uncertain changes in our political climate, it's critical that we, as peacebuilders, do not walk away from that determined optimism and remain focused on doing our very best work.

With best wishes, I hope the Toda Peace Institute carries that spirit to continue doing its valuable work well into the distant future.

Thank you.