



Refugees of the fighting in the Central African Republic observe Rwandan soldiers being dropped off at Bangui M'Poko International Airport, 19 Jan 2014. U.S. forces were dispatched to provide airlift assistance to multinational troops in support of an African Union effort to quell violence in the region.

# Golden Opportunities for Civilian Power

BY RICK BARTON

**T**he United States needs a united, affirmative agenda for conflict response in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the complexity and impact of far-flung conflicts grows, we must respond both effectively – to help countries resolve the top issues driving violence – and strategically – providing the right tools only when cases are ripe for our help.

While state-on-state violence has declined, today's conflicts are more varied. They erupt faster, with a greater ease and diversity of violence, under less control of political elites. Popular revolts are expanding, driven by emotion and commitment and spread by narrative resonance and all manner of media, often fueled by neighborhood meddling. Where the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw large conflagrations that killed nearly a hundred million people, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has started with hundreds of smaller, less ordered, yet fear producing events that kill dozens on most days and create a broad sense of insecurity. Overt attacks from within a region may no longer be necessary because of the ease of reach into other countries to promote conflict. These aspects of crisis are emerging at a time when the American people are looking for alternatives to the kind of interventions we saw in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Obama Administration has recognized this evolving dynamic and sought a constructive, forward looking U.S. role without overstating either our capabilities or our truthful understanding or commitment. Marked by admirable restraint, recent U.S. approaches have included supporting allies, leading international efforts, galvanizing multilateral responses, insisting on neighborhood ownership, initiating regional capacity building, as opposed to taking direct action. In the past six years, the U.S. has featured customized responses: direct air support in Libya; Iraq and Afghanistan draw downs (with adjustments); threats, negotiations, and now bombing in Syria; support for the French in Mali; UN burden sharing in the Central African Republic (CAR); driving the discourse in South Sudan; plus insisting that rapid change in places like Burma and Senegal include peace processes for long simmering ethnic and regional conflicts.

Addressing these conflicts requires a fresh optic, sharper focus, and new tools. As messy as these situations may be, the U.S. must be more effective. Despite years of efforts, the U.S. government still does not have an inter-agency response process characterized by a common

*Ambassador Rick Barton was the first Assistant Secretary of State for Conflict and Stabilization Operations.*

understanding of the situation, well-defined missions, clear priorities, agile responses that put a premium on local ownership from the outset, and the ability to move resources within the bureaucracy to those most capable of executing a plan. Somehow, our best efforts keep adding up to less than the sum of the parts.

Despite our shortcomings the United States still has a golden opportunity: others still look to the U.S. to provide sober guidance and thoughtful support; we have learned a great deal; American ingenuity remains a world force; and there are obvious changes to be made. While our history of industrial sized mega-embassies, tens of thousands of soldiers, and sprawling intelligence operations from Vietnam to Afghanistan has dismayed many

Americans and others, the U.S. is capable of early, catalytic action focused on local ownership that seeks political and social impact. It does not take billions of dollars or hundreds of deployed personnel. Rather, by adapting our best practices and overcoming our reflexive responses, we can deepen our understanding of these situations and choose the wisest way forward.

### Changing Conflict, Changing Response

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, 65 countries (43 percent of those studied) were at a high or very high risk of social unrest in 2014. Compared with five years ago, 19 more countries are now in the high-risk categories. That includes two-thirds of the countries in the Middle East-North Africa region.<sup>1</sup>



Magharebia

Tuareg Azawad rebels advance south towards Mopti in Mali, Jan 2012.

Each place is unique, but some new features are emerging. We see officially sanctioned political violence threatening to surge out of control (as in Kenya, Nigeria, or Bangladesh); emerging political movements that are unknown to their potential allies (the Arab Spring); and factions whose local campaigns carry outsized impact (the Lord's Resistance Army or Boko Haram). Of course, faster communications and transportation have sped up the competition.

Why do these places and conflicts matter? Instability inevitably threatens our allies, entire regions, and our homeland. These countries are potential or actual trading partners, home to markets of more than two billion people. Global power vacuums have a way of attracting terrorists or incubating longer-term problems. Moreover, U.S. leadership in the world is premised on engagement. As Secretary Kerry repeats, "I can tell you for certain, most of the rest of the world doesn't lie awake at night worrying about America's presence – they worry about what would happen in our absence."<sup>2</sup>

At home, public opinion has shifted away from support for foreign interventions. A December 2013 Pew Research Center survey showed that 52 percent of Americans say the United States "should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own." Just 38 percent disagree with that statement – the most lopsided outcome in nearly 50 years of measurement. Fifty-one percent say the United States does too much in helping solve world problems.<sup>3</sup>

Consider, however, that these polls take place after a decade of war that produced mixed results. Few hold up the extraordinary, military-dominated efforts in Iraq and

Afghanistan as a model for how we should approach conflict, or our engagement with the world. Vast intelligence operations have focused on terrorism to the exclusion of critical local knowledge. Fortress-like embassies and armored caravans deny diplomats rich country experiences. And, the development community is focused on areas such as health and food where it can make measurable impact, sometimes regardless of those programs' connection to broader, more political priorities.<sup>4</sup>

These dynamics have left our national security apparatus with a series of recurring problems: First, we do not know places or people as well as we should; second, we develop competing analyses of the problems they face; and as a result, without a common understanding, we cannot make prioritized choices about how to respond.

If you don't know where you are, what's going on or where you're going – you've got a problem. In other words, our many good efforts and programs did not add up to a magic formula for addressing conflict. We have heard many calls for reform<sup>5</sup>, perhaps most notably from the government itself. The 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review notes:

*For the past two decades, the U.S. government has recognized that U.S. national security depends upon a more effective approach to fragile states. Yet we have struggled with how to understand these challenges and how to organize our civilian institutions to deal with them. ... Many of the capabilities and skills we need for conflict and crisis prevention and response exist at State, USAID, and other federal agencies, but these capabilities are not*

*integrated and focused on the problem in a sustained way.*<sup>6</sup>

One important recommendation of the QDDR was the creation of a new State Department Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) in early 2012. At the heart of CSO was a recognition by the Obama Administration, then-secretary Hillary Clinton, and Congressional advocates of all parties that State has a *unique convening authority* only exceeded by the White House. To the extent possible, it is preferable for issues to be advanced to their fullest at the country level, where the Ambassador is clearly in charge, while at the same time with State's inclusive, integrative involvement of others in Washington where the authority and "country team" feeling is much less refined or evident.

To move ahead on such a significant reform agenda in a change resistant environment requires clear direction, organizational team building, cultural adaptation, and improved performance. CSO set out on an ambitious "proof of concept" first year by making clear that it would be most valued if it made a difference in one or two places that truly mattered to the U.S., developed the trust and respect of others, and worked in an innovative and agile way. In close cooperation with the regional bureaus, many others, and each in-country Ambassador, the initial focus was on Kenya's election related violence, Syria's early war, Honduras' destabilizing society-wide homicide explosion, and Burma's potential for peace. Another dozen situations were addressed, but 80 percent of the new Bureau's efforts were directed at the four major engagements.

Carryover work in Afghanistan and South Sudan was rapidly scaled down and making

choices became part of the new culture. At every opportunity, CSO encouraged the earliest possible convening of all active parties and pushed an organizational view that it would be the bureau that "was most likely to help others succeed."

In order to generate liquidity in a tough budget environment, the Bureau closed two of its three offices in the Washington area, reduced staffing, recaptured unobligated funds from earlier appropriations, renegotiated a series of interagency agreements, streamlined operations and built a new leadership team. Progress has been real. Over 20 ambassadors have welcomed CSO in their countries, analysis became more rigorous, creativity expanded, alliances with seven like-minded countries blossomed, teams grew stronger, and results were felt in several nations.

### The Golden Opportunity

"After a decade of war, it has never been more clear that diplomacy can be the transformational tool that shapes the world according to our values,"<sup>7</sup> stated Secretary Kerry. If conflict prevention and response are core missions for the State Department and USAID, how do we make that a reality?

In every conflict country, we face a full spectrum of challenges. The default response for all of us – the affected countries, other donors, and the United States – is to ask, "What can we do?" Many assume that the United States can address these problems, and that because we have the capacity, we should.

The more appropriate question is, "What is most needed?" With too many priorities, it is difficult to link programs to each other and to deliver on a broader strategy for success. In most places, there are two or three difficult issues that are essential to stability. Often they

are political, not technical, and require a highly integrated effort by every part of the U.S. government.

A familiar critique of our involvement in Afghanistan pointed out two competing visions within the U.S. government. One that we were going to build a viable democracy; and the other, that we are there to fight terrorism. President Obama brought new focus to the situation in 2009, but by that point, we did not have a common agreement on the main issues that needed to be resolved nor a shared plan to address them.

### Golden Rules

What are the key lessons of our past responses to conflict? What has worked, and how must we respond better? In our practice, we are seeing the emergence of three golden rules:

### #1 – Build a common understanding of the place, people and challenges.

We need deep, grounded, balanced, joint, independent analyses of the places in which we work. We must build broader networks in government, civil society, among women, youth, businesses, religious and minority groups, at both the state and local levels to get a richer picture and check our biases. We must examine situations holistically and not limit the range of issues examined (for example to our favorite, well-funded concerns). Our information must be analyzed through a conflict lens to seek out the root causes of friction, the positive and negative actors, and the actions that may spark violence or set a course toward peace. We must uncover what the situation requires of us in order to make a political impact.



Demonstrators in Cairo hold up 4 fingers as a symbol of solidarity with the victims of the destroyed sit-in protest known as Rabaa, which means four or fourth in Arabic. 23 Aug 2013

H. Elrasam

We have to expand our analytical framework. There is a natural instinct to think that “because I worked in Angola, I am smart about the Congo (DRC).” The political culture of the DRC may be more like Haiti, and Angola more like Serbia than like their African neighbor. We also need to look at cross cutting themes like religion and youth, and make sure that the issues at play on the ground are not filtered through our preferred optics, such as terrorism, narcotics and humanitarian threats. We have to look beyond familiar partners and established leaders to “silenced majorities:” people who seek fair governance and economic opportunity but don’t like the ruling elites or the traditional opposition and may lack an incentive to engage or even have a real fear of speaking out.



Demobilized child soldiers in the Central African Republic

Pierre-Henri

We must build on capital-based, government-centric political reporting by assuming risk and pushing “expeditionary diplomats” into the field to drill deeper into local dynamics and broaden our network of influencers. Earlier, more extensive on the ground political engagement often leads to greater understanding and improved analytics, plus broader contacts and context. If we wait until a crisis is clearly a threat to our interests, we may be too late to influence favorable local change. So much comes back to our understanding of the place, people, and problem.

We can reach beyond the interagency to bring together academics, international experts, diaspora, and civil society voices to develop agreement on the priorities of each case. With this information, all of the actors can forge a common understanding that identifies the most important dynamics fueling instability.

We must also bring new tools to the task of traditional diplomacy. For example, we can now integrate on-the-ground analysis with polling, big-data modeling, computation, and simulation to track violence trends, identify underlying patterns and causes of conflict, and forecast scenarios to predict outcomes, pairing diplomatic insights with bigger-picture analysis. Crunching large volumes of data can challenge conventional wisdom. In Nigeria, CSO used trend analysis to show that persistent violence in the oil-rich Delta region is nearly as pervasive as in the Boko Haram-threatened north. With the vast majority of Nigeria’s government funded by Delta oil revenues, the return of widespread violence in the South would be an equal threat to stability.

Capturing a range of information and then using game theory to model systems and test the outcomes of different scenarios is

another area of inquiry for CSO. Using such techniques, a joint U.S. government team provided useful insights on the sequencing of issues to the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and to planning for safe corridors and spaces in Syria.

In each case, CSO sought to translate analysis of conflict dynamics into actionable and prioritized policy and program options. Especially where traditional approaches face constraints, it is possible to add fresh perspective, conduct deeper analysis, and develop innovative solutions. Why do all this? Without this comprehensive understanding of what is happening in a place, the U.S. risks going in with a pre-cooked narrative and therefore an ineffective solution. CSO's job is to make sure that the U.S. is jointly answering the question of what is most important, as opposed to what is most available or familiar right now.

## #2 - Focus on strategic priorities.

Having reached a common understanding of the situation, we can then strategize on how to address the challenge. Where and when do we need to act in order to make a difference?

Kenya's 2007-08 election left more than 1,000 dead, displaced hundreds of thousands and set back Kenya's vibrant economy. A recurrence of such violence around their 2013 election would have done even more damage to the country's image and growth. The country was already home to many development programs and multiple Kenyan efforts to address the underlying issues from the earlier violence. Still, when asked, "What do you think is the most important problem facing your country at this time?" Kenyans typically responded, "Election-related violence and our inability to respond effectively." What more could the United States do on this issue in the short

term? Together, State and USAID agreed that two hot spots needed particular attention: the Rift Valley and the Coast. At the time, the U.S. assistance portfolio in Kenya was about \$800 million, much of which went to fighting HIV/AIDS.

In the Rift Valley, although USAID had strong democracy and governance programming motivated by the need to help address root causes of the 2007-2008 violence and to prevent a recurrence in the next election, the heads of all the programs wanted to do more. We asked them about their roots in the community. The horticulture program worked with 4,000 farmers; the AIDS program visited 220,000 households a week; and other programs had comparable reach. CSO found that the U.S. could build on these programs and direct their efforts toward conflict prevention even as they addressed their daily demands.

In the Rift Valley and Kisumu, sites of some of the worst violence in 2007 and 2008, the U.S. Embassy supported a Kenyan-led initiative called "Champions of Peace," composed of 26 Kenyan organizations, including churches, youth groups, and women's alliances. They mobilized thousands of citizens across ethnic lines to distribute voter education materials, counter political manipulation, strengthen early warning and response, and support constructive engagement with political actors.

In Coast Province, where Kenyans expressed deep frustrations with land rights and security, the United States supported a Kenyan-led early warning network to strengthen linkages between government, security forces, and civil society. Additionally, we worked with local police to improve community relations and bolster their prevention and response capabilities.



Rather than bring in Americans to support these efforts, CSO identified local partners and moved quickly to support them in the months before the vote, building on existing USAID models. CSO hired more than 100 Kenyans for up to six months through implementing partners and local NGOs – plus hundreds more volunteers – to work through the election. Employing Kenyans made strategic and economic sense, given their unmatched understanding of local dynamics.

The conflict prevention campaign to support Kenya’s electoral season had a different profile than most aid efforts. Focused on the paramount political challenge, it engaged 16 interagency conflict specialists for just over a year with half of them in hot spots beyond Nairobi. The funding streams combined USAID’s medium-term election preparation and conflict mitigation programs with agile, short-term aid that moved within weeks. Deaths from election-related violence were about 20, or a 98 percent drop from five years before.

Credit goes to Kenyans for a largely peaceful campaign, and the long-term efforts put in place by U.S. assistance agencies, bolstered by additional short-term analysis, funding and personnel.<sup>8</sup> By focusing on what mattered most at just the right moment, the United States offered some American ingenuity and an affirmative way forward to a worried population.

### #3 - Take catalytic action.

Indigenous ownership is the first step of peaceful, democratic change. However sincere America’s commitment, success depends on local people caring more than we do. In most cases, it is instructive to look at where our local partners have invested money and time. When

they are willing to expend their own resources, including national or local funds, or the time of their leadership, projects have a greater chance of success.

Syria is a good example. We had a wonderful embassy and ambassador in Damascus, but then had to suspend operations. A revolution erupted from places we did not expect with a surprising spontaneity and speed. We did not know the leaders, who were similarly disconnected from each other. In such a complex and dynamic environment, how do you find and empower the right actors and increase their chance of success? Though many groups stepped in to address a horrific humanitarian situation, empowering the civilian opposition was an explicitly political problem that required a completely different kind of initiative.

One of the main tasks during the first 18 months of the conflict was to get to know the Syrian opposition. Our interest was in expanding our familiarity and then helping them to be more capable today for tomorrow. Working from Turkey, the United States began a non-lethal train-and-equip program that introduced us to 2500 leaders at every level. This work grew into a unified U.S. effort, the Syria Transition Assistance Response Team (START), that coordinated all lines of non-lethal assistance to the opposition from the United States and brought international partners as well. At CSO alone, more than 1,500 people were trained and provided more than 12,000 pieces of non-lethal equipment in the first year. More importantly, we now know those people, have a sense of who is most capable, and found ways to build on their work.

The activists the U.S. worked with come from diverse sectarian, ethnic, and regional backgrounds. The equipment State and USAID

provided includes satellite phones, laptops and mobile Internet, and training on how to use these items securely. In opposition-held territory, our training focused on civil administration and inclusive governance, including strategic planning and communications, civil-military relations, negotiations, and mediation.

Through these networks of opposition councils, the U.S. and its allies have been able to address some essential political and social needs. In Aleppo, local policing arose as a major concern. Citizens there would prefer moderate local police to a justice system driven by outside extremists. By sending stipends of about \$100 per month to some 1,300 local police, the U.S., UK, and Denmark helped retain police who had defected from the Assad regime on the job and provided a bulwark against extremism. As importantly, by getting two international partners to join the program, CSO sustained it at a high funding level without asking more of the U.S. taxpayer.

The U.S. also helped to develop a network of independent media in a place that has never had it before. With modest assistance, Syrians established 11 independent radio and two TV stations that cover 80 percent of the pre-war population. CSO found and amplified a promising local effort that now provides vital safety information, news, and an independent check on the claims of all sides in the conflict. With this support Syrians are able to develop and broadcast their own programming.<sup>9</sup>

What unites these disparate lines of effort is their overt political purpose. Our support helped civilian opposition leaders inside Syria unify their efforts, connect to the international community, exercise civilian control over armed groups, and provide services to people in liberated areas. At a time when stopping

aerial bombardments by the Assad regime was not possible, this assistance gave our Syrian allies their best hope.<sup>10</sup>

Other countries face different challenges but offer a similar potential role for the United States. Honduras has the world's highest murder rate along with daunting public perceptions of corruption and impunity. To help change the narrative of runaway crime and government inaction, the U.S. Embassy began a partnership with a new Honduran-created coalition of non-governmental organizations

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including religious, youth, and civil society groups, the Alliance for Peace and Justice (APJ). In short order APJ grew into a nationally recognized and respected voice on security reform and government accountability. The coalition regularly engages with the President of Honduras and other policymakers, and is shaping national grassroots awareness on security and justice reform issues. APJ advocacy was instrumental in achieving first-ever public hearings by the Honduran congress with top law enforcement, prosecutorial, and judicial leadership to discuss accountability and security reform. To complement this work, the Embassy helped the Honduran government bring in high-ranking law enforcement officials from nearby countries to conduct an

audit of its Public Ministry. APJ was able to use the recommendations from that audit to help push for the eventual dismissal of an ineffective attorney general.

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To capture the public's imagination, strategic communications support for the government was provided, along with advisers for high-profile prosecutions, and assistance for a neighborhood-level security program that helped law enforcement earn convictions in 80 percent of its cases – 40 times the national average. Again, the common thread was a campaign to change the narrative that “crime pays,” with the U.S. looking for local partners whose work we could catalyze. As in Kenya, the U.S. brought together foreign assistance funding with deployment of experts to seize on quick-impact ideas that complement existing diplomacy and foreign assistance. These efforts happen in collaboration with long-standing programs focused on development, law enforcement, and trafficking, all under the strategic eye of a forward leaning ambassador who brings it all together with a clear purpose.<sup>11</sup>

### **New Tools, New Challenges**

Even as we seek to carry forward the three golden rules, challenges remain. Broadly described, there is a dangerous gap between policy-making and practice. Policy without

practical implementation might as well be a newspaper editorial. Practice that does not tie back to policy, could well produce nifty projects, but little impact.<sup>12</sup> As long as this gap persists, broader success in conflict areas is unlikely. Policy usually exists – how to make it meaningful is the missing link. A series of steps can produce a coherent approach that is not self-defeating. They are:

**Focus on places that matter, at opportune times, where the U.S. can make a difference.**

Today Nigeria is more important to the future of Africa and to U.S. interests than South Sudan, Burundi, CAR, Mali, Liberia, or a dozen other countries. Similar choices present themselves in other parts of the world. We need to make these tough calls, harbor our resources, and find other ways (often thru multilateral channels) to contribute to second tier places. Eighty percent of our effort should go to situations where there is real value and a “ripeness” and then the U.S. must insist on a targeted approach.

**Make sure that every crisis/conflict situation has a 24/7 State Department or USAID leader with clear authorities and an established support system at the earliest possible date.**

Significant international crises repeatedly stress the State Department and USAID's ability to lead the U.S. government response in a fluid, complex crisis. For civilians to be an organizational locus in Washington, a consistent structural response is needed to replace the current practice of starting anew in almost every instance. The QDDR set out a division of labor where State would lead operations in response to political and security crises and conflicts

and USAID would lead in humanitarian crises.<sup>13</sup>

A proposed model could work in the following way: within 48 hours of the eruption of a crisis, the Secretary of State should receive the name of a full-time Washington-based lead (the recommendation(s) of the Deputies, Undersecretaries, and USAID Administrator). That person should have a board of directors (regional, functional, Operations Center, and specialized, from State and USAID, depending on the nature of the crisis) to provide the immediate guidance, staff and resources. The leader's authority should allow for the design of a strategy and the shifting of enough assets to move ahead, and the daily management of the portfolio. Such an approach would force Washington to come together analytically and programmatically and enable greater clarity with the Embassy and country team.<sup>14</sup>

It should be somebody who can clarify direction, resolve differences, and make decisions, not merely coordinate or convene. We don't have to bring in special envoys for each case; just find good leaders and truly empower them with instant people, money, and the ability to move them around as needed.

**Conflict specialists should be part of every discussion about violence in a country or region.**

State and USAID are building a cadre of "conflict specialists" with experience in dozens of crises and they should be expected to provide insights and ideas that regional experts may not. Among the problem sets they should be ready to address are the following: political violence; the absence of national, regional or local dialogues; popular narratives that produce violence; loss of government control and

capacity; and, disengaged and/or fear struck publics.

**Develop an annual class of five to ten conflict leaders.**

State and USAID need more in-country leaders who are familiar with crises. A competitively selected group of up and comers who could spend two years working at CSO and USAID's Offices of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM), collaborating with embassies, other bureaus, the Department of Defense, the intelligence community, and other interagency players, would produce a strong nucleus of leaders for years to come. The key to a skilled and agile response is having talent that is prepared to take charge – and deep enough to adjust for unknowns.

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A natural complement to the development of such a leadership pool would be the advancement of a resident international exchange. The CSO experience with Nigerian and Bangladeshi next generation civil society figures suggests that a rich opportunity awaits.

**Create a network of networks to identify key people and talent in a timely way.**

We know that success depends on finding the right people and getting them to the right places quickly, so we need to try new ways to do that. Skill sets that are needed include: experts in investigating the underlying

dynamics; strategists who can design and implement practical strategies; and constant entrepreneurs, taking calculated risks to enhance the chances of success. They must combine traditional diplomacy (monitoring, reporting, advice, and coordination) with conflict expertise (focused analysis, planning, and operational experience), catalytic action (facilitating, amplifying, launching, and managing initiatives), and sub-national expeditionary operations (safety outside the wire). These skill sets do not often show up in one person, so it is essential to put together small, agile teams with proven leaders.

CSO's Civilian Response Network (CRN) needs talent both in and beyond government, in bilateral, multilateral, private sector, and host-country organizations. It increasingly includes informal partnerships with

organizations that have access to experts via existing staff, extended rosters, affinity groups, and listservs. Examples include academic listservs; roster-based organizations such as Canada's Civilian Reserve (CANADEM); international organizations like the United Nations; and U.S. interagency partners. LinkedIn and other existing systems are being tested to limit the overhead of a government run system.<sup>15</sup>

### Prepare to practice "asymmetric diplomacy."

Many of the countries in conflict will require "offshore" and cross border operations. Funding will be difficult to secure in a timely way. New leaders will emerge from the broad population of "silenced majorities," including women, youth, and others. All parties will use social media. Given these and many other



Julien Harneis

The Kibati refugee camp is located between the positions of government forces and CNDP rebels, separated from each other by about one kilometer. Here refugees wait to receive plastic sheets, blankets, cooking sets, soap, and other materials provided to the thousands of families in Kibati.

rapid fire changes, it is incumbent that our civilians be well versed in fast start coalition building, mass communications, identifying of unorthodox talent, political campaign organizing, working with multilateral organizations, and iterative interviewing techniques – among other skills. Asymmetric diplomacy must be “propositional vs. oppositional.”

### Find ways to expand creativity and innovation.

Right now the U.S. government faces an imbalance between native caution and American ingenuity. Risk-taking is not career enhancing and idea generation suffers. In the most dynamic parts of our society, such as Silicon Valley, words such as “disruptive” and “early adapters” are signs of a breakthrough producing exciting change. In Washington the same words are stigmatized, thought of as disturbing, out of order, and critical of existing practices.

Conflict work is high risk by definition. It is not a “stay in your lane” kind of pursuit. Less like a swim meet and more like water polo, there is an inherent chaos and need for goal scoring to build surges of progress.

Since most will fail and only some succeed, conflict investment is life’s most important and volatile venture capital business. Understanding risk, reward, and the inherent constraints of a violence prone place could liberate our creativity and produce more innovation.

### Invest in real time monitoring and evaluation.

We need faster, real-time evaluation so that programs can adjust in time to make a difference. An inspector general audit is often too late, whereas a McKinsey-like management

review allows for instant adjustments. We must never forget to ask ourselves whether our work is changing the situation on the ground, rather than how much money we have spent.

It is hard to claim success where conflicts do not occur, or where the conflict does not escalate. Yet when conflict does not break out or escalate, this surely supports the U.S. national interest. Establishing baseline measurements, taking the pulse of the population through a variety of methods, and constantly adjusting programs are all ways of maximizing returns in the toughest places on earth.

### Conclusion

How might better analysis, strategic choices, and catalytic operations look assembled in one place? Imagine an embassy in a high risk or conflict-ridden country with an operations center in which intelligence reporting, diplomatic traffic, and the vast amount of open-source information is available in real time. Imagine it includes predictive and trend analysis capabilities to provide data for decision-making, and a cell to pull it all together into a single campaign plan. Finally, imagine it can link to its range of field teams and implementers, and those field teams have full authority to take immediate action based on their understanding of U.S. objectives. Teams could make daily or even hourly adaptations to their messaging and programs based on local dynamics. Through it all, let’s make sure that we’re focused on the top problems and building off of local initiatives, rather than doing what seems most comfortable or easiest.

These are the toughest cases on Earth, where success will defy the odds and the conventional wisdom. We have to be willing to accept risk and acknowledge modest chances for success. Creativity is more important than

ever. We cannot be self-indulgent or believe that any one of us has the best answers.

As Secretary Kerry said recently, “If we are going to bring light to the world, we have to go where it is dark. ... We have an interest in helping people to build a stronger democratic institution, to take advantage of opportunity and create the futures that they choose for themselves. Indeed, those are the very places where we have the most to gain.”

Working with a world of partners, the United States still has a great opportunity to make a difference in a conflict-churned world. We are contributing in key ways. With ongoing help and humility, we will always do it better.

PRISM

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.economist.com/news/21589143-where-protest-likeliest-break-out-ripe-rebellion>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Remarks at Yale College Class Day, May 18, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2013/12/03/public-sees-u-s-power-declining-as-support-for-global-engagement-slips/>.

<sup>4</sup> According to the Center for Global Development: “At the aggregate level, only 16 percent of U.S. assistance has been focused on what Africans definitively cite as their most pressing problems. On average, less than one third of U.S. assistance has been aligned with people’s top three concerns in 11 African nations over time.” <http://www.cgdev.org/publication/anyone-listening-does-us-foreign-assistance-target-peoples-top-priorities-working-paper>.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/print/13378>; [http://cco.dodlive.mil/files/2014/02/prism3-18\\_bowen.pdf](http://cco.dodlive.mil/files/2014/02/prism3-18_bowen.pdf); <http://www.usglc.org/report-on-reports/>; <http://www.stimson.org/spotlight/new-report-diplomacy-in-a-time-of-scarcity/>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/153142.pdf>, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/12/218631.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Ambassador Robert Godec for his steady leadership.

<sup>9</sup> See the feature story on a Syrian partner [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/07/magazine/radio-free-syria.html?smid=tw-share&\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/07/magazine/radio-free-syria.html?smid=tw-share&_r=2).

<sup>10</sup> Special thanks to Ambassador Robert Ford and our colleagues in Turkey and Washington.

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to former U.S. Ambassador to Honduras Lisa Kubiske for her affirming leadership.

<sup>12</sup> Former Ambassador Jim Michel has warned development professionals about “patch of green” programs that feel or sound good but do not address broader forces propelling chaos and violence. Connection to policy and broad on the ground realities is essential.

<sup>13</sup> QDDR page 133 called for an Interagency Operational Response Framework (IORF) and while “The One Crisis Leader, One Committee, One Staff,

One Plan, One Mission” model has been proposed by CSO, it remains unfinished business.

<sup>14</sup> “The One Crisis Leader, One Committee, One Staff, One Plan, One Mission” model has been proposed by CSO and it remains unfinished business.

<sup>15</sup> In FY 2013, CSO deployed nearly 130 individuals – from the Bureau and the CRN – to 17 countries, with most of the effort concentrated in four major engagements. Individuals’ deployments average just over three months in length, reflecting our efforts to provide targeted, tailored expertise that catalyzes local initiatives, rather than open-ended engagements best undertaken by existing diplomatic functions.

<sup>16</sup> See a report by Craig Cohen at <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/srs1.pdf>; also, a more detailed look at how to apply some of the theories in live cases can be found at [http://archive.aspeninstitute.de/Aspen\\_Germany\\_Archive/The\\_Aspen\\_Institute\\_Germany\\_2008\\_files/2008\\_09\\_17\\_2008\\_AESF\\_International\\_Statebuilding\\_%26\\_Reconstruction\\_Efforts.pdf](http://archive.aspeninstitute.de/Aspen_Germany_Archive/The_Aspen_Institute_Germany_2008_files/2008_09_17_2008_AESF_International_Statebuilding_%26_Reconstruction_Efforts.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/05/209671.htm>.

## Photos

Page 54 photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran / UNAMID. 2011. *Al Lait (Noth Darfur): Some Southern Sudanese register their names to vote on the referendum for self determination in Alleyet North Center in Al Lait city (North Darfur). In this village, located near the border with South Darfur and Southern Kordofan) there are more than 2,000 Southern Sudanese registered for the referendum.* From <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unamid-photo/5372962556/> licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 2.0 Generic license. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/>. Photo reproduced unaltered.

Page 46 photo by Magharebia. 2012. *Touareg independence fighters are reportedly continuing their advance, advancing south towards Mopti.* From [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le\\_Mali\\_confronté\\_aux\\_sanctions\\_et\\_à\\_l'avancée\\_des\\_rebelles\\_islamistes\\_%286904946068%29.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_Mali_confronté_aux_sanctions_et_à_l'avancée_des_rebelles_islamistes_%286904946068%29.jpg) licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en>. Photo reproduced unaltered.

Page 50 photo by Pierre Holtz, UNICEF CAR. 2007. *Demobilized child soldiers in the Central African Republic A child soldier in a rebel camp in northeastern Central African Republic—a complex challenge for U.S., UN, and AU demobilization efforts.* From <https://www.flickr.com/photos/hdptcar/949798984/in/photostream/> licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic license. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>. Photo reproduced unaltered.

Page 56 photo by Julien Harneis. 2008. *Kibati camp is between the government forces positions and the CNDP rebels, about a kilometer separates them.* From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Congodistribution.jpg> licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 1.0 Generic license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/1.0/deed.en>. Photo reproduced unaltered.