Advances and Challenges in Political Transitions

What Will the Future of Conflict Look Like?

EDITORS

Robert D. Lamb
Johanna Mendelson Forman

A Report of the CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation

OCTOBER 2014
Advances and Challenges in Political Transitions

What Will the Future of Conflict Look Like?

EDITORS
Robert D. Lamb
Johanna Mendelson Forman

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS
Joy Aoun
Scott Aughenbaugh
Ernest Bower
Heather A. Conley
Richard Downie
Persis Khambatta
Andrew C. Kuchins
Stephen Lennon
Carl Meacham
Richard Rossow
Thomas M. Sanderson

A Report of the CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation

October 2014
About CSIS

For over 50 years, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has worked to develop solutions to the world’s greatest policy challenges. Today, CSIS scholars are providing strategic insights and bipartisan policy solutions to help decisionmakers chart a course toward a better world.

CSIS is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. The Center’s 220 full-time staff and large network of affiliated scholars conduct research and analysis and develop policy initiatives that look into the future and anticipate change.

Founded at the height of the Cold War by David M. Abshire and Admiral Arleigh Burke, CSIS was dedicated to finding ways to sustain American prominence and prosperity as a force for good in the world. Since 1962, CSIS has become one of the world’s preeminent international institutions focused on defense and security; regional stability; and transnational challenges ranging from energy and climate to global health and economic integration.

Former U.S. senator Sam Nunn has chaired the CSIS Board of Trustees since 1999. Former deputy secretary of defense John J. Hamre became the Center’s president and chief executive officer in 2000.

CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views expressed herein should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

© 2014 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. All rights reserved.

Photo credits:
Europe/Eurasia: Sasha Maksymenko, https://www.flickr.com/photos/112078056@N07/11879707146
South/Southeast Asia: Ashley Wheaton, https://www.flickr.com/photos/gtzeosan/3683986500
Complex Emergencies: Horace Murray, U.S. Department of State

ISBN: 978-1-4422-4041-4 (pb); 978-1-4422-4042-1 (eBook)
Contents

Preface        iv

1. The Future of Conflict and Transitions    1
   Africa            2
   Europe and Eurasia  6
   Latin America      11
   Middle East and North Africa       14
   South and Southeast Asia       18

2. Emerging Challenges in Conflict Environments    23
   Violent Extremism and Conflict    24
   Complex Emergencies and Humanitarian Response  26
   Urban Violence and Organized Crime  30
   Gender and Peace                34

3. Political Transitions Yesterday and Today    39
   Early Days                     42
   OTI's Second Decade            44
   What Is the State of the Field Today?  45

   About the Office of Transition Initiatives  48
   About the Editors and Contributors  50
Preface

The United States has provided support to political transitions worldwide for many years. But it was just 20 years ago that the U.S. government specifically established the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) to respond quickly in the aftermath of conflicts and maintain momentum toward positive change. Now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, conflicts have become much more complex. There are no longer just two or three parties to the conflict with whom settlements can be negotiated; rather, clashes can involve anywhere from half a dozen to scores of armed groups, and it is not always clear who is allied with whom or even what motivates their use of violence in the first place. Seldom are there peace agreements in place to act as a road map to transition. And more civilian-led development work is taking place in the midst of ongoing conflict.

In this report, the contributors consider not only how conflicts and transition work have evolved but also what today’s complexities imply for how they might change in the future. The text includes chapters on the future of conflict in each major region of the world and on topics such as extremism, urbanization, gender, and humanitarian response.

I am grateful to the contributors for taking the time to share their thoughts on these important topics and to others who were interviewed by my coeditor, Johanna Mendelson Forman, during preparation of this report, including Gordon Adams, Brian Atwood, Pauline Baker, Janine Davidson, Sylvia Fletcher, John Glenn, William Hyde, Robert Jenkins, Hardin Lang, Karma Lively, Clare Lockhart, Michael Mahdesian, Diana Ohlbaum, Susan Reichle, Russell Rumbaugh, and Don Steinberg.

Finally, I am grateful to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for its generous support in making this publication possible on the twentieth anniversary of OTI’s founding. OTI is not responsible for any of the views expressed in this report. CSIS as an institution does not take policy positions; accordingly, all views expressed are solely those of the author(s).

Robert D. Lamb
Director, CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation
The Future of Conflict and Transitions
Africa is the continent with the highest concentration of countries that are affected by violence and conflict and that appear regularly on lists of fragile states. CSIS senior fellow Robert D. Lamb sat down with Africa Program deputy director Richard Downie to talk about the conflicts and crises Africa is likely to face in the future and how the United States has positioned itself to deal with those challenges.

Robert D. Lamb: Where has the most progress been made in dealing with conflict and fragility in Africa over the past 20 years, and how has the international community contributed to that progress?

Richard Downie: The region where the most progress has been made is southern Africa. That’s where the continent’s colonial era lasted longest and had the most pernicious
effects. When it ended abruptly, competing resistance movements fought it out among themselves. In Angola, the United States played an unhelpful role in prolonging the civil war through its continued support for UNITA [the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola]. But elsewhere, it’s played a constructive diplomatic role, helping negotiate an end to conflicts in South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique. This region—Zimbabwe aside—has for the past two decades been by far the most stable region of Africa. But Sierra Leone and Liberia in West Africa have made impressive progress as well. As they overcame their civil wars, they benefited from sustained assistance from international donors. UN missions in both countries restored basic security and began the difficult task of security sector reform. Leading donors provided financial and technical assistance—the contribution of the United States was particularly important in Liberia. But both states remain highly fragile in spite of the progress made, as the ineffective response to the ongoing Ebola outbreak starkly illustrates.

Lamb: Both are good examples of how hard it is and how long it takes to overcome a history of conflict. Why do you think there’s been less progress elsewhere? Where do you see the most stubborn conflicts?

Downie: Mainly in countries where poor governance, corruption, and the unequal distribution of wealth cause grievances to fester and boil over. The Sahel is particularly vulnerable. Here, you can add extra ingredients to this combustible mix: abject poverty, a predominantly young and economically deprived population, land stress exacerbated by climate change, and centralized governments that struggle to extend the remit of the state much beyond the capital city. In places like northern Mali, young men don’t have viable livelihood opportunities, so no wonder they fall into the orbit of the armed militias or criminal gangs who are the main—and sometimes the only—sources of employment.

Lamb: I’ve always had a sense that part of the difficulty with international responses is that we’re thinking about some of these problems in the wrong way, and that the mix of policy responses is still tilted too heavily in favor of technical fixes rather than political settlements. Do you agree that we’re misdiagnosing the problem somehow?

Downie: Well, it does make sense in the long term to pursue technical fixes when they actually build resilience. It’s important to build better-functioning bureaucracies and institutions, for example, so that when crises do occur, they’ll do their job and limit the influence of spoilers and conflict entrepreneurs. The problem is how to get to this point, because the reality is that, in most African countries today, individuals continue to matter more than institutions. A more pragmatic approach is needed that recognizes this reality. Too often, the international community has ignored the root causes of these conflicts, focusing instead on dealing with their symptoms and prescribing top-down solutions that favor central governments whose legitimacy is widely questioned. When conflict breaks out, it’s generally because of a breakdown of consensus among small numbers of individuals. Therefore, the only practical approach in the near term is to pursue political solutions, helping negotiate elite bargains between combatants. Institution building is a longer-term undertaking.
Lamb: China is getting more and more active on the continent. How, if at all, is that affecting politics, corruption, conflict, and extremism?

Downie: China’s influence in Africa has been a net positive, actually, providing Africans with much-needed infrastructure and increased opportunities for trade and investment. At the same time, China’s avowed policy of noninterference in domestic politics has meant it’s been willing to do business with some of the continent’s most corrupt, authoritarian regimes, such as those in Sudan, Angola, and Zimbabwe. This has been a boon for incumbent autocrats. But it’s hard to make the case that China has directly fueled conflict and extremism in Africa. It shares with the United States an interest in peace and stability, and conflict threatens its business interests, in places like South Sudan, for instance. As its ties in Africa get deeper, China’s doctrine of noninterference is going to come under more strain.

Lamb: Does its presence affect U.S. influence in Africa?

Downie: China does limit U.S. influence there—although not to the extent commonly portrayed in the media—mainly by offering itself as an alternative suitor to African governments who have no interest in heeding U.S. advice on promoting democracy and good governance.

Lamb: What are your biggest concerns over the next 20 years? What’s the hardest problem to solve?

Downie: There are two big, intractable problems that have implications for security in the region. The first is poor governance, which continues to blight a number of [African] countries. Indeed, that number has increased in recent years, reversing some of the positive progress made in the 1990s and early 2000s. One particular manifestation of this problem is leaders who remove constitutional term limits. By altering, or threatening to alter, constitutions in order to stay in office, leaders like Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso undermine their nations’ institutions and run the risk that opposition to their incumbency will take on increasingly desperate, even violent, forms.

The second big problem is the lack of viable African security institutions to respond to conflict in a timely, professional manner. The continent currently lacks political leaders with the skill and vision to take ownership of the issue and produce models for a homegrown—and financially sustainable—African security architecture.

Lamb: Weren’t some of these issues addressed at the summit the Obama administration hosted in Washington with African leaders this summer?

Downie: Well, new trade and investment deals were the main summit takeaways. But, yes, there were some significant announcements on peace and security as well. President Obama announced the setting up of a $110 million a year African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership that will work with six African countries to provide peacekeeping operations across the continent. A separate initiative will work with a different set of
countries on security-sector reform. The first plan tries to address the critical need for professional, homegrown, rapidly deployable peacekeeping institutions. If it succeeds, it will be a valuable asset. But the countries receiving the training—which include Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda—appear to have been chosen for their relative military competence, not for their democratic credentials. Each of these three countries is ruled along increasingly narrow, autocratic lines, in a manner that has the potential to sow the seeds of domestic conflict in the future. By further empowering these regimes through military support, the United States risks undermining rather than promoting security.
Concerns about conflict in Europe and Eurasia came back into focus in 2014, when Russia intervened in Ukraine and annexed Crimea. Meanwhile, international troops were withdrawing from Afghanistan amid a threatened Taliban resurgence, and Pakistan moved troops to its western border to attack insurgents there. And instability in the Middle East is complicating relations among European partners and drawing NATO allies into the possibility of conflict. CSIS senior fellow Robert D. Lamb sat down with Europe and Eurasia senior vice president Heather A. Conley and Russia and Eurasia director Andrew C. Kuchins to talk about the challenges the United States and its European partners are facing in the region.

Robert D. Lamb: Let’s actually start outside of the region. How is instability in the Middle East affecting European security?
Heather A. Conley: The conflicts in Libya, Syria, and Iraq have significantly increased the number of immigrants to Europe—twice as many so far this year [January through August 2014] as in all of 2013. This is straining some of Europe’s most fragile economies and abetting the rise of nationalistic, populist, and xenophobic political movements. On Europe’s southeastern flank, the so-called Islamic State [sometimes called ISIL or ISIS; see Middle East and North Africa] is a major concern because it is believed that as many as 2,500 European passport holders have already joined them. There’s a concern radicalized jihadists might return and stage large-scale terrorist attacks at home. ISIL is also a serious threat to Turkey, where nearly 100,000 Syrian Kurds fled in a recent 48-hour period. As Iraqi and Syrian Kurds drift further away from their national governments, the prospect of an independent Kurdistan could resonate with Turkey’s own restive Kurdish minority.

Andrew C. Kuchins: The greater Middle East is in the southwestern corner of the Eurasian supercontinent, so what is happening now in Syria and Iraq is certainly a part of a very disorderly conflict and instability pattern we’re seeing across Eurasia. It was striking to read recently that an al Qaeda affiliate occupying territory on the Syrian side of the border with Israel has chased away UN peacekeepers who have been there for 40 years. A conflict that destabilizes the border with Turkey will require a more direct NATO response, and NATO already has its hands full in the region. The bandwidth challenge was on full display at the NATO summit in Wales in September. That meeting was supposed to be devoted to the massive challenges in Afghanistan, but the conflict in Ukraine received the most attention.

Lamb: Before we talk about Ukraine, let’s talk about what’s happening inside Russia that might explain some of its behavior recently. Russia’s got some major internal problems of its own—a declining population, health problems, growing inequality. What effects do you think Russia’s potential decline over the next 20 years is likely to have on how it behaves toward its neighbors?

Kuchins: Periods of power shifts in the global order are always more dangerous, and currently in Eurasia we are seeing the most striking juxtaposition—a rising power in China and a declining power in Russia—that we’ve ever witnessed during peacetime in modern history. Just 30 years ago, the Soviet GDP was four to five times that of China, and now their positions have reversed. Of course, Russia is a smaller country than the USSR was. But still, it’s a striking reversal. Given that Vladimir Putin has shown no interest in promoting economic growth since returning to the presidency in 2012, what else does he have to justify his leadership into perpetuity to the Russian people besides what I call his “Greater Russia Project”? It is impossible to know how durable such a program will be. But, in my view, we are in for years of such challenges with Putin leading Russia.

Conley: That’s an important point. Russia’s recent actions in Ukraine and at home have tapped into a vein of Russian nationalism and chauvinism and strengthened President Putin’s consolidation of power in the short term. In August 2014, his domestic approval ratings hit an all-time high of 87 percent. But over the long term, after tough Western
sanctions, President Putin has harmed the future of the Russian economy. Russia is heavily dependent on natural resource exports, but its oil production is projected to fall by nearly 13 percent between 2020 and 2025. That won’t change without access to Western technology and investment to develop its offshore and unconventional energy resources. Expanding markets in Asia might help offset the loss, but Russia is going to face fierce competition from producers in the Middle East and North America and will be forced to cut unfavorable deals to secure exports, like its recent long-term gas deal with China. Russia’s principal energy export market, Europe, is also attempting to diversify away from Russian energy sources. On top of all that, Russia’s population is expected to shrink from 140 million to 137 million in 2025, and even further to 124 million by 2050. Those are a lot of challenges to take on at once.

Lamb: Last March, Putin sent his troops to illegally annex Crimea, and he’s been providing military support to pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. How has that affected relations with Europe?

Conley: It’s definitely changed the tone and tenor of Russia’s relations with all its neighbors, particularly those in the Eurasia Customs Union. Countries such as Kazakhstan, which has a substantial ethnic Russian population, 22 percent, understand the extent to which Russia will intervene to protect its interests. Russia’s self-isolation requires it to be on a constant war footing, with the West—and more specifically the United States—as its enemy, while it attempts to bolster indigenous industries and economies, much as it did during the Communist era. It will continue to play the global spoiler to the United States, attempt to keep Europe divided and off-balance using threats and cohesion, and try to encourage other emerging economies to counter America’s global and regional influence.

Lamb: I’ve long been concerned about conflicts involving people who don’t have real representation in the international state system. Not just stateless populations but also people who live in statelets such as Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria—the four so-called “frozen conflicts” of the post-Soviet era—places where hot wars have cooled into a tenuous stability but the territory itself is not under the control of the state to which it nominally belongs. The situation in eastern Ukraine is a reminder we have a long way to go in figuring out how to resolve regional and subnational political disputes involving people who fall through the cracks of the state system. Is this something we’re going to see more of in Eurasia?

Kuchins: Unfortunately, the answer is yes. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh heated up considerably this year, with more frequent incidents of fighting. It looks very likely that part of eastern Ukraine will end up being the fifth frozen conflict in the post-Soviet space.

Conley: I think that’s right. More than 3,000 people have been killed in the conflict so far, and as many as 1 million Ukrainians are believed to be displaced. A recent peace plan implementing a 30-kilometer buffer zone between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists does essentially create a fresh frozen conflict in yet another post-Soviet country. It’s unfortunate because, despite a number of diplomatic efforts, those other four
conflicts continue to fester in a state of semi-permafrost without resolution. This is primarily because the common denominator in all of them—Russia—views such unresolved crises as an opportunity to maintain influence in these countries and prevent them from seeking a Western orientation. I was very concerned to hear Putin's March 18 speech articulating a new national security approach designed to protect all ethnic Russians regardless of where they live. Moscow could try to implement this in Latvia and Estonia, which are NATO members with sizable ethnic Russian populations, 26 percent and 25 percent respectively.

**Lamb:** Europe has long been among the most stable regions in the world, but there are still a lot of problems in Eastern Europe and, particularly economically, in Southern Europe. Any trends that point to significant political shifts or possibly conflicts turning violent? What about in Western Europe, where immigration seems to be creating political challenges and nativist backlashes?

**Conley:** Europe is enduring its fifth year of painful austerity, anemic economic growth, and tepid steps toward integration. Unemployment, particularly among young people, has persisted and deepened in some places. It's not surprising that populist, nationalistic, and xenophobic groups are voicing opposition to austerity, immigration, globalization, and an “out of touch” political elite. Some of these highly euro-skeptic, anti-elite, and in some cases pro-Russian parties are gaining in popularity. If that continues, governmental paralysis will worsen and fuel antiestablishment resentment, and coalition governments could collapse under the weight of social unrest and economic weakness. Antigovernment sentiment could even generate support for secessionist movements in prosperous regions like Catalonia in Spain, the Veneto in Italy, and Flanders in Belgium, which resent the transfer of regional wealth to poorer areas amid painful austerity measures. These movements have been emboldened by Scotland's recent referendum on independence from the United Kingdom [on September 18, 2014], and the continued inability of national governments to address local concerns.

**Kuchins:** Part of Putin's agenda is undermining the unity of the European Union. So he is a strong supporter of right-wing nationalist politicians like [Marine] Le Pen in France and a host of others whose popular support has been on the rise in recent years. Hungary even has a prime minister, Viktor Orbán, who is a “fellow traveller” of Vladimir Putin. It's hard to see how this will develop, but certainly there are big risks to stability in parts of Europe if these groups grow stronger.

**Lamb:** What do you see as the U.S. role in the region's conflicts over the next 20 years? Is our influence changing?

**Kuchins:** NATO's power, influence, and credibility have dramatically diminished in recent years, and Vladimir Putin is presenting a direct challenge in Ukraine that NATO has responded to with great difficulty. The perception of NATO's failure in Afghanistan represents a major blow to the institution. In the 1990s, NATO was moving forward on expanding both its mission [out of area] and its membership. While there is some possibility that Sweden could desire membership, which would likely be granted, I think both of those
expansions are basically off the table for now. The biggest challenge for NATO now is ensuring the credibility of its commitment to Article V [collective defense] among its existing members, especially the Baltic states.

**Conley:** Fundamental questions have been raised about American leadership and credibility in the world as state and nonstate actors challenge the international legal principle of territorial integrity. After the Syrian government used chemical weapons in a direct challenge to President Obama’s stated “red line,” our allies questioned America’s treaty commitments, and enemies perceived a lack of policy resolve. I think the United States now needs to take consistent policy action and demonstrate steadfast leadership internationally to overcome the self-inflicted damage caused by its failure to enforce its red line in Syria. The Obama administration’s swift response to reassure its NATO allies following Russia’s actions in Ukraine was a step in the right direction. But to fully restore confidence in American leadership abroad, Washington needs to ensure that NATO maintains a credible deterrence against potential future Russian aggression on its borders and simultaneously maintain an effective multilateral coalition against ISIS and continued unrest in the Middle East and Africa.
There has been a strong consolidation of democracy and market-based economies in Latin America since the end of the Cold War. But even as long-standing conflicts such as Colombia’s are making real progress toward stabilization, criminal violence has become a major problem in the region, unresolved economic hardships have at times kept class tensions on the forefront of politics, and democratic backsliding has occurred in some countries. CSIS senior fellow Robert Lamb sat down with Americas Program director Carl Meacham to talk about how Latin America’s conflicts and transitions have evolved.
**Robert D. Lamb:** Latin America has made a great deal of progress in democratic transitions. Is it too early to declare the democratization project a success? And has the United States played a constructive role?

**Carl Meacham:** There definitely has been a lot of progress, but it’s a pretty diverse region. Mexico went from one-party rule to a successful alternation of power. Brazil, Chile, and Colombia are democracies that are evolving because of their growing middle classes. On the other hand, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela are less democratic. Overall, there have been positive trends, including free trade and strengthening of government institutions, and the United States did contribute to a lot of that progress. But there is a range of opinion about whether the U.S. contribution has been a net positive. During the Cold War, U.S. policy focused more on security—and rightly so. Democracy was treated as a corollary to security interests. Since then, there has been more of an emphasis on free trade, which provides institutional relationships with the United States that go beyond politics and political turnover. But the economic changes in the region over the past couple of decades, though significant, haven’t always been accompanied by the best conditions for social mobility.

**Lamb:** It’s true, there is still a lot of poverty and violence in the region. Haiti is struggling to recover from the earthquake in 2010, which followed decades of poverty, corruption, and conflict. Central America and Mexico are experiencing disturbing levels of drug-related violence and, in some cities, deteriorating social order. Colombia has almost defeated its leftist insurgents but still faces significant challenges to its authority from organized criminals and armed actors formerly associated with paramilitaries. Talk about some of the trouble spots that have you most worried.

**Meacham:** I’m most worried about instability in Venezuela and transnational crime in Central America. Venezuela is facing serious economic and political instability driven by resource scarcity, poverty, high levels of crime, and the government’s mismanagement of the country. Narco-trafficking has increased significantly after a lot of the traffickers moved from Colombia to Venezuela. Venezuelans are polarized, and the crisis overall is deepening and worsening. Its diplomatic presence in the region is boosted by exports of discounted oil, which links it to a lot of other countries. But what happens when they aren’t able to provide other countries with discounted oil in the future? Its own economy will suffer, but there will also be harshly felt ripple effects, particularly in Colombia, the Caribbean, and Central America.

Central America is itself facing a lot of troubles: lawlessness, lack of economic opportunity, violence, corruption, weak government institutions, to name just a few. It’s a very dangerous mix. Illegal immigration to the United States has drastically increase as poor conditions in the region incentivize migration northward. With cooperative agreements to combat drug trafficking in Colombia and Mexico, a lot of the drug trade found easier, more fertile ground in Central America. In other words, the drug trade and associated crime just migrated to a new region.
**Lamb:** What about other countries? Argentina defaulted on its debt and inflation has been skyrocketing. Haiti is perpetually in dire straits. Do you see any of these situations coming to a head in the near future?

**Meacham:** You’re right about Haiti. Election dates have been missed, so the provisional delegation that’s supposed to certify elections has not been named. If they don’t resolve this and other issues, unfortunately the result is going to be the same cycle of instability we’ve seen for a long time, and things could even get worse.

There’s a lot of hope and interest regarding investment in Argentina, but that country tends to go through condensed boom-and-bust cycles as well. Long-term reforms never seem to come, and institutions don’t change. Argentinians need to find a way to break this cycle.

**Lamb:** What about Cuba? I’d be very surprised if there weren’t major changes in the U.S. relationship with Cuba in the next 20 years, though nobody’s ever gotten rich making that bet. Do you agree? Do you see young people demanding political change there, or is it an American pipe dream?

**Meacham:** Change is already happening within Cuba, but at a glacial pace. The economic situation is unsustainable, and young people feel that they lack employment opportunities. That could lead to a push for economic and democratic reforms, though most agree that we shouldn’t necessarily assume that it would be the type of democracy the United States hopes for. But it will open up eventually, and as it does there will likely be greater economic and political opportunities there. But as we’ve learned with Cuba, the timeline for change is impossible to predict.

**Lamb:** Ever since the Monroe Doctrine, the United States has always considered Latin America to be its sphere of influence. Are China and other Asian nations making headway in the region? How do you see American influence evolving?

**Meacham:** Latin America is already expanding its partnerships beyond the United States, particularly in Asia. Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico—the founding members of the Pacific Alliance—are particularly attractive trade partners across the Pacific. And Brazil already has a robust economic relationship with China, which has replaced the United States as the South American country’s number-one trade partner. Economic relations eventually turn into political alliances, so we’re likely to see some political developments there, especially as China becomes an even stronger trade partner in the Americas. The United States really hasn’t caught up with this reality—our foreign policy toward Latin America is pretty firmly stuck in the past. We need to learn how to take advantage of shifting economic opportunities and political realities or we’re going to end up having to play catch-up sooner than we’d like to believe.
This report is largely focused on what internal conflicts will look like region by region over the next 20 years and whether the United States is prepared to deal with them. But in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), there is so much change and strife happening today that it seems premature to talk about the future of conflict there. CSIS senior fellow Robert D. Lamb sat down with CSIS adjunct fellow Joy Aoun to talk about the protest movements and civil wars that are reshaping MENA and what that implies for the future.

Robert D. Lamb: Before 2010, it seems that a lot of area studies scholars spent more time trying to explain the stability of the authoritarian regimes in MENA than they did studying its fragility. But protest movements were growing and becoming bolder for years
leading up to the so-called Arab Spring. Did anyone see this coming, or were people just taken by surprise?

Joy Aoun: Nobody predicted the Arab uprisings in late 2010 and 2011 or when, where, and how the chain of events would unfold afterwards. But some people in the policy, academic, and activist communities had warned for years that the socioeconomic, governance, and demographic structures were unsustainable in a number of MENA countries. For example, successive Arab Human Development Reports warned of growing internal pressures across the region, and they seem prescient with the benefit of hindsight.

Lamb: How would you grade the U.S. response to these events?

Aoun: It’s hard to grade the U.S. response. The U.S. government was facing a mix of factors that would have made any set of responses complicated. There was an understandable focus on domestic stability and recovery in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008. There was strong demand from the American public to curb the scale and scope of U.S. military deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan and avoid future entanglements in the region unless there were clear and present threats to core U.S. national security priorities. The uprisings that started in 2010 and 2011 had roots in social contracts in countries like Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia that were articulated after the Second World War. With relatively small labor forces and cheap energy costs, regimes felt they could offer stable socioeconomic prospects and employment in exchange for limited to no popular political contestation. More than 50 years later—and after years of demographic expansion, coupled with increasing energy prices and limited per capita GDP growth—it became clear that many of those social contracts had either collapsed or were severely degraded. A challenge of this size and scale, and built up over so many years, would be difficult for any country to deal with effectively. That includes the United States.

Lamb: Despite its best efforts to get less involved in the region, the Obama administration is back to trying to lead a coalition to fight the so-called Islamic State, sometimes called ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) or ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). What are the challenges there?

Aoun: With ISIS active across eastern Syria and western Iraq, the challenges facing both countries are increasingly viewed as interconnected. Shared histories, a long common border, cross-border tribal ties, and now the emergence of ISIS are tying Iraq and Syria together. But it’s also important to remember that Iraq and Syria present their own unique sets of challenges, and those challenges will still be there if and when ISIS is degraded or changes over time.

In Iraq, these include finding realistic and stable forms of governance that both empower and provide a degree of security for the country’s leading communities, including but not limited to Shi’a, Sunni, and Kurds. The failure to achieve fair representation of Iraq’s Sunnis has led to decreased support for the central government in Baghdad and in some cases increased support for the virulently anti-Shi’a ISIS.
Syria, meanwhile, faces its own challenges. In the 1970s, Hafez al-Assad and the Ba'ath Party forged a social order meant to end a cycle of coups and counter-coups and to contain the country’s intercommunal and urban-rural divisions. More than three years of conflict now have left Syria in what may yet be shaping up to be a long-term civil war. The conflict has also become deeply sectarian, reflecting a broader pattern of heightened regional competition between predominantly Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi’a Iran, among other regional states.

Neither Syria nor Iraq has to become so intractable that only “burning out” can make some form a settlement inevitable. The resignation of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq [in August 2014] has shown that competing regional forces on either side of the internal struggle for power can cooperate, if not find some way to agree to disagree. The same is true, in principle, in Syria.

**Lamb:** What other trouble spots have you most concerned?

**Aoun:** Well, other countries in the region also present key challenges tied to governance. Post-revolutionary Egypt continues to struggle with lingering volatility in Sinai and the threat of attack against government and security targets. Jordan, long plagued by deficit central government spending, needs to contend with instability in Iraq while constantly trying to keep the Hashemite monarchy out of Syria’s civil conflict. Lebanon’s failure to create consensus around a new president in April led to successive rounds of voting, and the country’s top job remained vacant in early October. Meanwhile, Lebanon continues to face security threats from ISIS and other groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra that would like a foothold in the country’s historically undergoverned northeast frontier with Syria. And you can’t ignore Yemen, which continues to struggle with its own governance challenges, the continued presence of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and the country’s persistent challenges tied to its widening sectarian divisions.

**Lamb:** In most of these countries, the demand for political change came first mainly from young people who wanted better life prospects. But the concern for jobs—to oversimplify—seems to have gotten drowned out by much broader disputes about whose way of life should dominate a society’s political regime. We saw that in the dispute between Islamists and secular authoritarians in Egypt and between Sunni and Shi’a militants in Syria and Iraq, to name just few. Who in the region has the willingness and capability to both maintain stability and foster some degree of prosperity or at least opportunity in the future?

**Aoun:** Certainly no single state in the region can deal with all these issues. The unrest has fostered some interstate cooperation, but a lot of it has been driven more by national self-interest and concerns about resource scarcity than by a desire to foster prosperity and opportunity.

One example is the plan to expand the Gulf Cooperation Council. The GCC, led by Saudi Arabia, proposed that Jordan and Morocco join the Council, and it offered them funding to
alleviate some of the financial pressures they were facing due to high public expenditures and subsidies. In part, this reflects a desire to help stabilize two fellow monarchical regimes, but Saudi also wanted to preserve key parts of the existing regional state system to inoculate the GCC states from further instability. Aid to Egypt after the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood–led government of Mohamed Morsi is a similar example—it wasn’t just to stabilize a weak post-revolutionary economy, it was also to preserve friendly relations with the government in Cairo. All of these cases highlight the impact of resource scarcity and mismanagement, too, as no country can sustain expensive domestic fiscal policies and high levels of external aid indefinitely.

Regional instability has been building up for years, and no one country has a viable path or a stable recipe for long-term prosperity. Regional states can and do play a stabilizing role. However, that stabilizing role is consistently offset by national foreign policy priorities and the fact that no country has the means to fix the underlying forces driving what may still be years, if not decades, of painful unrest.
There is a huge amount of diversity in the countries of South and Southeast Asia, which stretch from Afghanistan to many of the coastal and island nations of the Indian and Pacific Oceans—countries that China, India, Japan, and the United States all consider to be in their respective spheres of interest. CSIS senior fellow Robert D. Lamb sat down with Southeast Asia Chair Ernest Bower, India Chair Richard Rossow, and India Chair adjunct fellow Persis Khambatta to talk about the future of conflicts in this rapidly changing region and how the United States is preparing to deal with them.

Robert D. Lamb: Let’s start with India. It’s an ambitious country, a growing economic powerhouse, and increasingly a regional military power. Yet it has a good number of
armed conflicts taking place within its borders that get very little international attention. What effect are those conflicts having on its ability to exert the kind of economic and military influence it wants?

**Rick Rossow:** Setting aside the numerous other struggles in India’s troubled northeast region, there are two main internal struggles reaching across India: Maoists and Islamic extremism. Both stand a fair chance of worsening under the new government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Maoist violence might increase because the Maoists are trying to portray their struggle as “pro-poor and anti-capitalist.” They target mining operations—sometimes illegal—in tribal and other rural areas and have some level of local support. The Modi government wants to quicken the pace of India’s industrialization, which risks exacerbating confrontations with Maoist groups as certain industrial clearances are expedited. Meanwhile, Islamic extremism may rise as a backlash against the dominance of Modi’s party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in national politics. It’s reasonable to expect that over the next five years the pro-Hindu BJP will do some things to increase religious tensions. The action might be something relatively simple such as rewriting a textbook to have a more Hindu-centric view of India’s history, or something more dramatic such as stoking localized religious riots as an election gimmick. This could result in, or be triggered by, terror attacks by local Islamic extremist groups.

**Persis Khambatta:** Not surprisingly, Prime Minister Modi’s new government has embarked on a rethink of how to address the spreading threat from the “Left Wing Extremist”–affected areas, as the Maoist and other extremist movements are now known. Along with a focus on security, the new Home Minister Rajnath Singh and his internal security team are trying to address some of the underlying issues, such as development, quality of civil service, accountability, and efficiency. If the new government can address security and bring their campaign mantra of good governance to the huge swathes of land affected by extremists, then the state might finally be able to begin exerting a moderate level of economic influence over those areas.

It’s also important to remember that Modi’s election reflects the unmet ambitions of India’s youth. Half the country is under 25 and nearly two-thirds are under 35. The 66 percent voter turnout set a new record as an increasingly engaged population voted for Mr. Modi and the BJP. Their campaign maintained a determined focus on development and good governance, issues that clearly resonated with a frustrated and aspirational young population. Yet, at the same time as poverty has been reduced, the middle class has expanded, and literacy rates have increased, there are still those left behind—unable to capitalize on opportunities in the new economy and often living in areas with communal tension or areas so rural they’ve been forgotten. Their renewed focus on these rural areas from both a security and development standpoint should be seen in this larger context.

**Ernest Bower:** I’ve also seen a lot of hope surrounding the businesslike, decisive mantra of Prime Minister Modi’s campaign. But if India wants to become a regional leader and drive connectivity between South and Southeast Asia, it will have to address the real
feelings of dislocation and disconnectedness of India’s three most eastern states. It can’t look east to Myanmar and ASEAN if it doesn’t connect with its own eastern states in new and sustainable ways. Modi does seem focused here. He also faces real challenges in tamping down conflict with Pakistan and finding a path to greater cooperation with Bangladesh and Nepal. He signaled his intentions to innovate in this area by inviting the leaders of these countries to his inauguration. One area to watch is India’s support for Vietnam in the South China Sea. That could draw India more closely into emerging Indo-Pacific security architecture, including the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+).

**Lamb:** Speaking of Myanmar/Burma, that country is undergoing an important political transition that has gotten a huge amount of international attention. I’ve heard complaints that the attention has been more than the country’s most competent and reform-minded civil servants can absorb—spending so much time in meetings with international donors that they don’t have enough time to do the job of reforming their institutions. How would you characterize the sophistication or effectiveness of the international response to Burma’s opening?

**Bower:** International support for Myanmar’s historic political and economic reform effort is necessarily ambitious and understandably enthusiastic. But the well-meaning donors and nations that want to support sustainable change need a better understanding of Burmese history and culture and need to pay close attention to lessons learned from other transitions from authoritarian and military rule to more democratic models. These transitions are not easy, and different key influencers have different stakes in the process. Reform will take time, as we’re seeing in Indonesia, and it will not be linear or without setbacks.

The most serious supporters of reform in Myanmar will understand these factors and work on being effective, not trying to score points with global constituencies who want and vocally demand immediate and concrete changes. That sort of process is less likely to be successful in Myanmar, and though the country has made breathtaking strides to date, it has much work to do ahead in the next two to three decades. That is the sort of time frame that’s most appropriate in thinking about how to support reform in Myanmar.

**Lamb:** Looking at the whole region, where are the hotspots that have you most concerned, and why?

**Bower:** The most alarming conflicts in Southeast Asia include the historical political conflict—or we should say existential struggle—for how political and economic power will be structured in the next generations in Thailand. After that, societal, religious, and economic competition in Myanmar all contain threads powerful enough to turn back political and economic reforms if not managed properly. Conflicts in southern Thailand and West Papua, Indonesia, deserve close attention. There’s some progress and good news in the southern Philippines, but progress usually comes in cycles and hopefully the recent peace agreement will break that “one step forward, two steps back” pattern.
**Lamb:** Can you say something about how competition between China and India, or China and Japan and others, is likely to affect how much influence the United States has in the region, particularly when it comes to encouraging reforms, consolidating peace, or mitigating internal conflicts?

**Khambatta:** China’s increasing assertiveness towards its neighbors in both the East and the West has set off alarm bells globally. Not only does China have maritime disputes with Japan and Southeast Asian nations, its two recent incursions into Indian territory set off alarm bells in New Delhi. The most recent one occurred just before China’s president paid Mr. Modi a visit in India, casting a shadow over other bilateral matters. Mr. Modi’s government is likely to welcome increased economic ties with both China and Japan, while showing a stiffer spine toward China in regards to its disputed border area. At the same time, India's Look East policy has pulled it closer to Japan and ASEAN, who are likewise hoping India will be a more consistently engaged regional power to provide balance in the area. China and Japan are also looking to invest in the developing markets in the region—notably ASEAN and South Asia—and balancing investments from the two economic giants will be important. India and ASEAN recently signed a Free Trade Agreement for services and investment, which is expected to boost ties significantly. Regional countries will likely welcome increased attention from Japan and India, but remain careful not to irritate China.

**Bower:** China has an enormous influence on Southeast Asia because of the size of its economy, its geography, its growing military capabilities, and most important because its neighbors don’t know what China wants to be in terms of its role in Asia. Recent upticks in China’s assertiveness, even aggression, in the maritime arena in the South and East China Seas and beyond have forced Southeast Asian countries to look to other countries like the United States, India, and Japan for ballast to balance China’s push to redefine itself. The region wants China to be successful, feel secure, and play a major economic role in the region. It does not want to see a China that uses its new economic power and military might to impose its definitions of sovereignty on smaller neighbors.

**Lamb:** Any long-term trends that have you concerned, looking out over 20 years? Is the United States prepared for them?

**Rossow:** One positive trend in India is the increased stability of leaders at the state or subnational level. Much of what India’s citizens see of “governance” is delivered by state governments, not the national government. This includes domestic security. State governments have long suffered from “anti-incumbency.” However, the long-term trend is toward stability, which is allowing state governments to begin thinking beyond five-year periods of governance, setting policy frameworks that aren’t entirely focused on short-term gains before the next election.

A worrying trend, however, is our on/off relationship with the BJP, which hinges on whether they are in power. When the BJP is in power, we find much stronger alignment of our national interests and a desire to work together. When the party’s out of power, we
tend to define them as extremists and anti-American. Certainly some of the party’s rhetoric as an opposition party helps paint this picture, but we should develop a better understanding of its core beliefs and maintain relations with the BJP when they are out of power, just like we should be doing with the Congress Party, which is now in opposition. The case for partnership with the United States needs to be made consistently and with a wide range of actors.

**Bower:** Asia is changing and mostly in positive ways. The middle class in Southeast Asia is asserting itself and pushing for stronger institutions and more transparency in governance. This is eroding central control by leaders and parties that held all the levers of power after the colonial period and particularly during the Cold War. Those models are changing as Asia becomes more prosperous and plugged into global information flow and supply chains. Asians rightly have higher and higher expectations of their governments and bigger ambitions and goals for themselves and their children. This trend will certainly challenge polities such as China and North Korea, and those challenges could result in increased jingoism and even a push to assert national goals in ways that result in conflicts with others.

The United States needs to have a more engaged and sophisticated strategy for Asia that leads with deeper economic engagement—beyond just trade agreements—and embraces the power and innovation coming from Asian citizens in areas like health, education, energy, and science and technology. The U.S. political system is two decades behind the pace of change in Asia, and that does not allow us to focus aptly on American national security priorities or engage Asia at a pace and on a scale that’s appropriate given the region’s undeniable importance to our economic prosperity and security.
Emerging Challenges in Conflict Environments
In July 2014, former UK foreign secretary William Hague described a turbulent global landscape as one not simply experiencing a series of regular disruptions; instead, he suggested that the world was suffering from “systemic disorder.”\(^1\) In a similar vein, former U.S. national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski characterized the environment as “historically unprecedented in the sense that simultaneously, huge swaths of global territory are dominated by populist unrest, anger, and effective loss of state control.”\(^2\)

---

Indeed, every day seems to bring news of emerging crises and deeper chaos, with few signs the world’s troubles are abating. China’s assertive posture in Asia has the neighbors scrambling to bolster their armed forces, reinforce territorial claims, and buttress relations with the United States. Russia’s confrontation with Ukraine and NATO holds the prospects of conflict in Europe. A worsening in one or both of these regions could herald a new economic downturn worldwide.

The MENA regions are experiencing widespread conflict and extremism—with few prospects of a turnaround. Rivalries between key states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran continue apace through substate proxy forces. Beginning in North Africa in late 2010, the Arab Spring offered the promise of economic opportunity, justice, and self-rule. But four years later, the region has more often witnessed despair, economic paralysis, and violence. The players include countless militias, insurgents, terrorists, government security services, and political factions—all contesting control of territory, populations, and resources. The integrity of Libya, Syria, and Iraq are in serious jeopardy at the same time insurgent groups like ISIS are surging in influence and capability—and in some places governing as a state.

At the heart of this turmoil are two distinct but related phenomena. States are less able or willing to exercise power and authority over their people, territory, and (shrinking) resources, while actors at the substate level are simultaneously wielding greater capabilities than ever before. This is not a new state of affairs, but the trend has worsened sharply over the past year.

Incompetent or corrupt regimes are failing to provide basic services and opportunity to their populations. Filling that void are ethnic- or sectarian-based groups and sophisticated criminal gangs that are not only supplanting traditional government roles but challenging states on the battlefield. The ongoing confrontation between ISIS and several powerful nations bears witness to this reality.

Caught in the middle are millions of citizens with scant economic opportunities, no security, and little control over their own lives. With their own governments often at fault, many people look to alternative sources of authority and service provision. Violent extremist groups offer a respite for those seeking relief, along with a promise of empowerment and even revenge—very appealing choices for many individuals in this environment, given their lack of other options.

Despite the strong desire by many to avoid these confounding problems, there is little doubt that the United States will remain deeply engaged in finding solutions. The prospects for continued violence, radicalization, and global “systemic disorder” appear to be very strong, and the United States and its partners must prepare themselves for a rough ride ahead.
Since the end of the Cold War, the concept of humanitarian assistance has evolved from the act of saving lives after natural disasters or wars to a much broader set of activities that includes creating livelihoods, jump-starting governance, and rebuilding communities. Where humanitarianism was once relegated to the likes of organizations like the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), today a broad array of actors operate in that space, including development agencies and the U.S. military.
The chasm that once separated humanitarian action from development is no longer as evident, especially as complex emergencies (CEs) arising from weak and fragile states have brought a much more difficult set of problems forward. At USAID, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) remains the center point in the U.S. government’s response to natural disasters globally. But in the course of the past 20 years, OFDA’s sister organization, OTI, has also come forward to address the nexus between humanitarian assistance and short-term development needs. Today, OTI’s mission when working on a CE is to help restore order and governance to populations where both man-made and natural disasters threaten stability. It is fair to say that OTI has become the bridge that links not only security and development but humanitarianism and development.

As research underscores the linkage between weak governance and complex humanitarian emergencies, it is clear that the single mission of saving lives is no longer sufficient to manage the types of problems we see globally. Today, response to CEs—a term developed at the end of the Cold War—is best handled by a coalition of military, civilian, and nongovernmental actors whose unique capabilities are coordinated to help move victims to a place where political development can transform communities.

OTI’s growing involvement in humanitarian response serves as a useful case study of how international responses to CEs have evolved over the past 20 years.

For OTI, humanitarian assistance is part of its mission of helping people to establish temporary livelihoods, to gain skills training, and to heal the wounds of war. But the changes in the nature of emergencies have made it necessary for OTI to develop a protocol for working on specific emergencies. When asked how OTI determines which cases they chose to assist, OTI staff noted that a specific humanitarian crisis must be part of a larger political transformation in any given country; without this political nexus, OTI will not get involved. In practice, though, OTI involvement seems to be determined by whether their well-developed mechanisms for rapid and flexible response make their participation essential. In Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, OTI was on the ground quickly, working with the U.S. military to rapidly assess the damage and provide immediate programming that included job creation (rubble removal and other cleanup activities) to help restore a sense of normalcy. It set up the first press center so that information to the outside world could flow quickly and smoothly after this tragic disaster. OTI’s role in Haiti was also needed because of the total devastation of the USAID Mission there. This was not the case in the Philippines, however. In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan, the storm that destroyed the islands in the Eastern Visayas region, did not involve OTI because it had already exited from its only program on the major Philippine island of Mindanao. Moreover, a strong international response was already in place, and the USAID Mission—with long experience in natural disaster management on the islands—was engaged in managing this emergency.

---

3. A complex emergency (CE) is defined by the United Nations as a humanitarian crisis in a country, region, or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and that requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single and/or ongoing UN country program. Complete definition available at http://www.who.int/hac/about/definitions/en/.
During its first decade, OTI was involved in the rebuilding of Honduras after Hurricane Mitch destroyed 70 percent of the country’s infrastructure in 1998. Carlos Flores, then president of Honduras, estimated that the hurricane had set back the country’s economic development by 50 years and caused the worst flooding ever experienced there. Because OTI was already working in the region, it was called upon to help with job creation and small infrastructure projects. The impact of this natural disaster not only affected the economy of Honduras but also undermined an already weak government. It is not surprising that today OTI is again working in Honduras, not because of a natural disaster but because of the breakdown of governance that has left it exposed to illicit criminal activities and a young, large, unemployed population in need of immediate support to prevent further disintegration of local communities.

Other natural and man-made disasters saw OTI engagement during its two decades of operation. From the conflict in Kosovo, to the fighting in the Sudan, to the tsunami in Sri Lanka and Indonesia and the floods in Pakistan, the presence of OTI alongside OFDA and other international agencies and the U.S. military symbolized the dynamic nature of humanitarian response in the twenty-first century.

By 1994, OTI was being called upon to supplement OFDA’s response to CEs requiring large-scale humanitarian assistance. Whether it was after the embargo ended in Haiti with the restoration of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, or after the genocide in Rwanda, OTI’s skills in political development brought to the situation an ability to rapidly assess needs and implement programs that helped give surviving populations a sense of hope and community. OTI found itself filling a gap in many countries where scant attention to political development had been given in rural areas. Its programming worked side by side with humanitarian efforts that were being provided to help feed and shelter the many people who had been affected by the complete breakdown of governance.

The ability to contract rapidly and deploy personnel on the ground was a feature of OTI programming that resonated with military planners, who often assisted in the logistical support to USAID in managing disasters but had little skill, interest, or mandate to go beyond a supporting role in getting life-saving goods to desperate populations. This ability to jump-start development assistance also created a space for USAID field missions to address longer-term programs that would ultimately support the rebuilding of countries destroyed by natural disasters or conflict. Speed, flexibility, and rapid response to the local context won over many in the State Department who saw in OTI a partner to help create an enabling environment for diplomacy. As one OTI staffer noted, “It does not matter what they roped us into, we are an operational office that works in contingency environments.”

One early feature of OTI that was especially important in humanitarian response was the staff’s ability to see the customer as the aid beneficiary. This client-based approach to development was prescient. Research on aid recipients in times of crisis confirms that

4. Personal communication, September 2014.
giving beneficiaries a voice in the way assistance is given and managed is essential for a successful outcome. Communities that are engaged in their own rebuilding can better anticipate their needs and sustain their political development.

An enduring legacy from its work on humanitarian response has been a stronger relationship between the OTI and the civil affairs officers of the U.S. military. OTI is teaching the military about what development work entails. A stronger respect for the role of each of the institutions has emerged from two decades of field operations and disaster management. Similarly, inside USAID, the operational offices that include the Office of Food for Peace and OFDA are now better coordinated and understanding of their respective missions as we continue to live in a world where interstate warfare declines but state fragility still threatens the peace and security of millions of people.

At the end of the Cold War, humanitarian assistance by civilian aid workers to alleviate suffering evolved into “humanitarian intervention.” This dramatic shift in conflict—from interstate wars, which declined during the last decade of the twentieth century, to intra-state conflicts arising from weak and fragile states—tested the capacity of both civilian and military agencies to find appropriate responses to the dual crises of human suffering and bad governance.

OTI was created because the world in 1994 looked very different than it did only a few years earlier. It was a time when disaster management needed the know-how of those who could inject political needs into mainstream development. And the demand for this new form of rapid response assistance was increasing faster than USAID could meet them.

OTI’s work in the humanitarian space evolved as part of the central mission of supporting transitions that sought democratic change, while also trying to restore hope to many who had become victims of the breakdown of governance in their nation-state. That OTI was capable of adding value to the U.S. government’s toolkit is clear today. However, it will still take time to help the recovery of places and populations that have been the victims of decades of ineffective governance. When natural disasters occur in those states, the impact is devastating, not only because of the physical damage to the land and the economy but because of the lack of effective capacity to rebuild. Fortunately, the procedural components of rapid response to crises at USAID, and especially in OTI, has become a more integrated function of our civilian and military institutions, thus ensuring the best results to those who suffer the most.

---
Urbanization represents one of the twenty-first century’s most significant trends, as cities become the preeminent human habitat. Cities that grew as spaces of communal security and as regional economic hubs are now nodes in international political, economic, and social networks. The rate, scale, and character of their growth is redefining the terms of human ecology and generating new landscapes that are vulnerable to human security challenges, natural disasters, and forms of governance that enable powerful nongovernmental actors to transcend political boundaries and dictate policy outcomes. Yet, in many ways, our current understanding of the nature of city-specific factors and conditions contributing to human and environmental vulnerability is inadequate.
Urban growth was rapid over the course of the twentieth century, and it will continue to advance quickly over the next 20 years. The overall world population reached 7.3 billion people in 2014 and is projected to exceed 8.3 billion by 2030. Notwithstanding its scale, this rate of population growth will not match the projected scale of urban growth over the same period: urban populations will grow from 3.8 billion in 2014 to more than 5 billion in 2030. Most of this growth will occur in Asia and Africa.\(^6\) We often discuss the largest of these cities, sometimes referred to as megacities (a term used to differentiate urban agglomerations with populations exceeding 10 million). Depending on growth models and dynamic urban-rural administrative demarcations, there could be as many as 43 megacities in 2030.\(^7\) Of these, 24 are located in Asia and 6 are in Africa.

Every year, millions of men, women, and children relocate to peri-urban spaces. The newly urbanized commonly find themselves forced to live in the most insecure spaces, such as along the edges of ravines, on flood-prone streambeds, on unstable slopes, or in slums and shantytowns so densely populated that they become marked with ignominious titles such as Lagos’s “Face Me, I Face You” complexes. The speed and nonuniformity of this migration overwhelms existing urban infrastructure and service provision capacities, generating interrelated negative social, health, and economic externalities.\(^8\) The severity of this insecurity is nowhere more apparent than for the 930 million inhabitants in developing countries, specifically in sub-Saharan Africa, who live in a slum.\(^9\)

Organized crime and the potential for violence from terrorist or insurgent networks pose a further challenge to human security in quickly urbanizing environments. Problems found in megacities—economic disparity and high unemployment—make them a prime breeding ground for violent nonstate actors. Many fear the sheer size of these cities will allow criminal groups to flourish undetected by local government or legal authorities. The absence of rule of law and basic services has the potential to provide safe haven to organized criminals, insurgents, and other violent nonstate actors.

Transnational criminal organizations corrupt and intimidate governments and facilitate illicit trafficking, which makes them one of the more pernicious nonstate actors. UNODC emphasizes in its 2013 West African Threat Assessment that underserved communities—particularly those in border areas—can profit from the flow of contraband,

---


“leading them further and further from the reach of the state.”\textsuperscript{10} Livelihoods that benefit from governance vacuums are unsustainable but usually preferable to poverty. Those involved in illicit trade are willing to defend themselves violently when their livelihoods are threatened—whether by the state or by rivals. To make matters worse, wealth accrued through illicit trafficking is often sufficient to buy cooperation from high levels of government, meaning corruption is both enabled by and an enabler of organized crime.

Fortunately, the challenges posed by urbanization have garnered the attention of state authorities. In considering future war-fighting scenarios, the U.S. Army and other nations’ militaries are increasingly pointing to urban battlefields, specifically within megacities. In a Strategic Studies Group report from June 2014, Army Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno cited megacities as a conflict zone in which the United States is not prepared to operate.\textsuperscript{11} In April, the Australian Army released its\textit{ Future Land Warfare Report 2014}, in which it claimed that the future of warfare would most likely be concentrated in the “urban littoral.”\textsuperscript{12} The emergence of unregulated cities represents a major strategic threat to urbanizing areas around the world.

Despite this attention to scenario development, policymakers’ actions to counter the challenges of urbanization fall short in three areas.

First, governance matters, but our understanding of formal and informal governance structures needs to evolve.\textsuperscript{13} While formal governance is reasonably well understood, informal systems tend to be underappreciated in policymaking. Illicit actors often govern territory they control, a form of governance more often dismissed than studied. In cities where formal systems are strained (or never existed), hybrid forms of governance tend to dominate, and policy frameworks continue to fall short in their ability to understand and influence hybrid governance.\textsuperscript{14} Decentralization of governance is a possibility for improving support, but the circumstances under which decentralization works are not well appreciated and the division of duties under decentralization are often poorly defined, coordinated, and staffed.\textsuperscript{15} The risk is that local responsibilities are neglected.

Second, social and economic inequality, extreme weather, water stress, food riots, and energy poverty are going to play greater roles in urban violence in the future, and

policymakers have not invested nearly enough in the preventive tools and policies needed to address them. Testifying before Congress in early 2014, James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, observed that “many countries important to the United States are vulnerable to natural resource shocks that degrade economic development, frustrate attempts to democratize, raise the risk of regime-threatening instability, and aggravate regional tensions.”16 As an example of this, one could argue that the violence in Tunisia at the beginning of the Arab Awakening in 2011 started with food riots.

Third, policymakers have failed to identify what agency will lead the U.S. government efforts to address the challenges of urbanization. As with many development, security, and climate change issues, there often is no single agency capable of carrying out or overseeing all of the tasks that need undertaking. In order to mitigate the significant risks associated with urbanization and the emergence of megacities, many government institutions—among them the U.S. military, USAID, and the State Department—along with NGOs are going to need to learn how to work together in urban environments.

The best predictor of a state’s level of peacefulness is not wealth, democracy, or identity: it is how well its women are treated. Recent studies about the nexus of gender and peace conclude that there “is a strong and highly significant link between state security and women’s security.” Where violence against women is high, states are weaker and unstable. In places where the rule of law allows impunity in crimes against women, there will be a higher tolerance for general violence and greater instability. Progress for women will only occur when there is equal access to education, the right to political participation, the right to health care, pay equity, and equal opportunity in employment. A society must embrace all its citizens, not half the population.

OTI was founded on the principle that responding to opportunities to support democratic transitions, even in some of the world’s most difficult post-conflict environments, requires the participation of women. Where war had left women widows, or where exclusion of women left so many behind in their pursuit of education, OTI saw the potential of harnessing women’s power to rebuild and reconstruct a community. Where transitions were helping societies empower women through a democratic political process, OTI was working with local women’s organizations to ensure full participation in the political process.

Gender has always been an overarching theme in OTI’s work. Even before the March 2012 release of USAID’s *Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy*, OTI’s field operations acted upon many of the principles that the policy espouses today.18 That policy states that “USAID’s work in conflict-affected and fragile states should promote women’s participation in all efforts to prevent, resolve and rebuild following conflict: prevent and respond to sexual and gender based violence; and ensure that relief and recovery efforts address the needs and priorities of women and men.”19

From its creation, OTI has practiced the principles of female empowerment through its work with communities, its support for NGOs that addressed the needs of women, and its understanding of gender as a crosscutting issue in all its field programs. Even during the short time frame where transition initiatives programming filled an important gap in the development work of USAID, OTI’s sensitivity to the needs of women and children were central to its ability to provide hope and lay a foundation for longer-term development activities.

Because OTI was focused on identifying the most urgent needs in any transition situation, it used field-based assessments to identify opportunities that would make a tangible difference in any given country. One of the earliest and most successful efforts was in Indonesia. In 1998, after the resignation of President Suharto, OTI was brought in help local groups in the political transition to democratic civilian rule. Nascent women’s groups—eager to vote but fearful of political repercussions—were among the key actors in the transition. OTI resources helped to galvanize local women’s groups, supporting new voices of emerging leaders in Aceh, Java, and West Papua. Programs helped to bring men into the political process who would work alongside women with the goal of reducing political violence. Women’s radio journals became a means for educating women about the right to vote and the electoral process. OTI grantee Internews used local journalists to develop specific programming. These small but well-planned interventions demonstrated how important gender was in that political transition.

Afghanistan is another country where OTI’s early programming made a significant difference after the initial military actions ended in 2002. In a country where the Taliban

had subjugated women as part of their fanatical religious agenda, OTI was one of the first civilian offices of USAID to address some of the most desperate needs of women and girls. During the war, the number-one killer of women was childbirth as the Taliban had prohibited women from seeing physicians or going outside their homes. Working with the Afghan diaspora, OTI supported access to maternal health care.

An assessment done by OTI determined that after security, education was the Afghans’ highest priority, especially since women and girls had been prohibited from attending school. OTI started a program that worked to rehabilitate old schools and build new ones. They supported classrooms that brought in females of all ages to gain literacy skills.

OTI Afghanistan programming also worked with the thousands of widows who had not been able to work. One of the most important contributions to the integration of women leaders into the government, something that President Hamid Karzai had advocated from the beginning of his administration, was the creation of daycare centers in the new ministries so that women could work while having a safe place to leave their children. Even in rural areas, where OTI supported the construction of roads, its contractor, the International Organization of Migration, helped bring women into the building process so that all members of these isolated communities could gain a livelihood.

More recently, OTI’s work in Honduras provides another example of ways in which creative approaches to security and development that incorporate women can help stabilize even the most violent of situations. Organized criminal activities overwhelmed communities. OTI saw that women could play an increasingly significant role in conflict prevention at the local level by (1) taking the lead in organizing and implementing activities to improve community security in their neighborhoods, and (2) increasing trust between communities and Honduran government institutions. Because women are the face of their communities, the relationship between women and local government actors is essential if Honduras is to restore the rule of law in the face of overwhelming challenges posed by powerful criminal organizations. Although not a war zone, Honduras has the highest homicide rate in the world. Having women in communities working with local governments to build confidence in public safety is an important part of the efforts to promote security for all citizens. OTI’s innovative programming identified women as the central actors in promoting peace and security in a violent country.

Women, children, and the elderly have suffered the most as civilians become the targets of violence arising from conflict. Over the past 20 years, our understanding of the role women play in stabilizing and rebuilding societies after conflicts has evolved. These efforts have been demonstrated by the demand-driven programs that OTI has supported in over 55 countries. Listening to women and empowering them through projects that build on their skills as peacemakers has proved essential in rebuilding communities and in advancing the transition from short-term to longer-term development investments. Too often in conflict, women are viewed as the victims; in practice, however, they are also the healers. They are not only consumers of security, but by their own work in communities
they are producers of more stable environments for reconstruction. Post-genocide Rwanda
in the late twentieth century is emblematic of the significant role gender can play in build-
ing peace, justice, and reconciliation, no matter how horrific the events.

As of late 2014, USAID has a strong policy on gender and a commitment to working with
women and men to ensure a more inclusive type of democratic development. But this was
already a core component of OTI’s programming 20 years ago. By making gender a cross-
cutting issue, OTI staff provided a means for incorporating the needs of women into all of
its assessments and program design. In this respect, OTI was ahead of its time and a leader
for promoting policies of inclusion and voice in transition situations.
3 Political Transitions
Yesterday and Today
I recently asked an expert on U.S. foreign assistance if he could succinctly describe the work of OTI. He immediately responded, “effective,” and added that OTI’s credibility was based on its effectiveness. It is an apt description of what OTI does when it sets out to work in some of the world’s most difficult settings. Indeed, it has been precisely because of OTI’s effectiveness that this small office in USAID enjoys its reputation for being a true rapid response mechanism to address the short-term political development needs of countries emerging from conflict, or making the transition from war to peace. That is no small compliment from someone who works to assess the quality and capacity of U.S. foreign assistance.
After 20 years, OTI has proved that a concept conceived in the early days of the post-Cold War to fill the gap between relief and development could actually evolve into an essential tool of civilian response in the U.S. government toolkit. To examine the history of OTI is to review the evolution of U.S. assistance policy as it was transformed from the Cold War–era view that development was more about winning hearts and minds in a bipolar context to a recognition that democracy and governance are basic ingredients in the mix of aiding people back from the brink of disaster.

From its infancy in 1994 to the work OTI does today, it has demonstrated time and again that it is less about large amount of resources and more about the process by which these resources are spent that can make a difference in whether stability or conflict continue. Timing, the agility of programs, and the flexibility to change course if a something is not working are not typical characteristics of development programming. But the OTI methodology of moving quickly to respond to the immediate and central needs of a stricken society is what drives its effectiveness and what makes it essential to the way our country uses assistance in the reconstruction process.

When USAID’s leadership established this unique office in 1994, the former USAID administrator J. Brian Atwood was well aware that political development was essential if future conflicts were to be prevented.¹ He helped to build OTI as a new kind of development experiment that would integrate the economic needs of rebuilding with the political needs of legitimacy of the state and its leadership. Its work was clearly to go beyond the mere saving of lives to the rebuilding of them. A different kind of humanitarian assistance was being developed along the way.

OTI was never meant to be a substitute for long-term development. Indeed, in the best of worlds it was to become a bridge that would help shape the longer-term development needs of a given country working with the USAID Missions and with other donors whose role it was to sustain the initial gains made in the transition period. This smooth handoff from OTI programming to mainstream development work has eluded full implementation. At first, it was because OTI was thought of as an outlier in the USAID universe—cowboys working on global crises that required speed and flexibility. As transition work became better integrated into development planning, OTI’s work gained acceptance. It allowed OTI to hand off its programs with carefully developed exit strategies that are still a part of OTI planning.²

¹. OTI was first conceived of at USAID by former administrator Andrew Natsios, when he led the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, and by his deputy, James Kunder. Both experienced humanitarian assistance experts, they recognized the need for USAID to have some form of rapid response mechanism. But their idea came at the end of the first Bush administration, and some say too focused on the humanitarian side of the equation and less on the political development needs that would distinguish OTI from the humanitarian role that USAID already managed.
². “OTI was designed to deploy short-term initiatives, to bring about reconciliation. Often these programs had the potential to evolve into longer-term development projects. Yet, there was little effective communication between the OTI team, which was present on the ground for a short duration, and the subsequently established development mission. The orientation of the OTI team was to create a more peaceful environment in a very brief period. The development mission was staffed by professionals who had a longer perspective—people who thought that the OTI teams were short-term fire fighters, not development people. That was an unfair
Early Days

To address the dynamic changes that were taking place in the last decade of the twentieth century, it was clear that the United States government would need a new set of policy tools to address what was happening on the ground. In 1993, Secretary Lawrence Eagleburger set down the first directives to create an office within the USAID that addressed the gap between humanitarian aid and development. OTI would become the new tool that our government would use to help manage the political transitions arising from humanitarian crises and intrastate conflicts.

The Clinton administration was eager to make this concept a reality. USAID administrator Atwood, along with a handful of staff, inaugurated OTI in 1994. Ambassador Rick Barton from Maine was chosen by Atwood as its first director. It was housed in USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Response, where OFDA was located—a clear signal that the initial vision of being a tool to bridge the gap between relief and development was just that. Politically, this was an important move. Atwood wanted to emphasize that OTI's mission would not compete with the long-term development agenda that was still the lifeblood of his agency. From 1994 on, OTI became the designated first responder to nonhumanitarian relief crises.

From the outset, OTI was thrown into the business of post-conflict reconstruction without a “how-to” manual or specific guidance about the way its mission would play out in the field. Three staff members and a director, with some administrative support, were to cover the globe, albeit the choice of where OTI would operate was as much a factor of available resources as it was about where there was capacity to act. With a budget of only $10 million, OTI's ability to have an impact would of necessity be somewhere that could leverage other donors and other U.S. government agencies to partner and support the OTI program.

In its first two years, OTI was able to start a program in Haiti to help restore democratic governance after a successful negotiated end to a three-year stalemate. It joined a larger U.S.-led UN Peace Operation, a first for OTI. By creating community programs in six of Haiti's nine departments, OTI was able to provide a sense of state presence and order in isolated regions of Haiti, winning the recognition of the White House in the first days of this early post–Cold War CE. It also provided the know-how to help reintegrate soldiers from the former armed forces into job-training programs in partnership with the International Organization for Migration. OTI's involvement in the demobilization of the Haitian armed forces was controversial at the time, because USAID's development agenda did not see the nexus of security and development as clearly as it does today. In addition, OTI

characterization, but it did contribute to a disconnect in the transition-to-development continuum.” J. Brian Atwood, former USAID administrator, 1993–1997, Inside Development, DEVEX.

3. Douglas Stafford, the assistant administrator for humanitarian response at the time, and his deputy, Michael Mahdesian, were instrumental in the early days of OTI in supporting and guiding the mission of political development. They helped protect OTI from more skeptical development and humanitarian advocates who were not convinced about the need for such an office.
started programs in Angola, where it worked with the United Nations and with the USAID Mission to prepare the country for peace after a long civil war. Similarly, after the genocide in Rwanda, OTI worked with community groups, doing innovative projects around bringing human rights violators to justice, helping draft legislation on criminal law, and rebuilding confidence in the state through support of media programming that allowed for the broadcast of the trials of those who perpetrated crimes against humanity. Attempts to start programming in the Balkans were initially not as successful but served as an early test for OTI about the need to have a secure environment in which to create transition programs. After OTI’s first director, Rick Barton, returned from Sarajevo and noted that bullets were flying when he left the hotel, USAID administrator Atwood said that the situation did not yet seem ripe for resolution. “Ripeness” became a standard that remains central to OTI’s planning when it comes to working on countries experiencing ongoing violence and conflict.

In the early days, OTI had many suitors—more, in fact, than its budget would allow. As peace accords were being managed by the United Nations and the Economic Community of Western Africa, OTI was also right behind with immediate on-the-ground support, helping the demobilization of the Guatemalan insurgents and working in Sierra Leone and Liberia on stabilizing those war-torn societies. In Asia, OTI went to the Philippines to work on a program managing insurgents in Mindanao. It also supported UN and multi-donor efforts in East Timor as that country emerged from a violent civil war. While in the Balkans, the Kosovo crisis marked a time when the both the humanitarian component of USAID and the transition programming collaborated to deliver services for thousands of displaced persons. This integration helped ensure that once the fighting stopped there would be space for OTI programming.

One constant for OTI involvement from the outset was creating a set of criteria for engagement. What was laid out 20 years ago remains the standard today and includes the following questions:

- Is the transition significant to the U.S. national interest?
- Is there a window of opportunity to help key individuals or groups support a transition?
- Is OTI's involvement an essential component for a positive transition to take place?
- Is the operating environment sufficiently stable to enable programming to reach beyond the capital so that on-the-ground support can take place?  

OTI brought new concepts into the development lexicon: ripeness and transition windows. Specifically, OTI applied the concept of ripeness to its implementation stage, meaning that investment of resources in a place that was not ready for assistance would never reap results. Similarly, the concept of a transition window complemented the ripeness idea. As

the idea evolved, it was likened to the medical concept of the “golden hour,” where there is only a limited time frame to prevent further disaster. And once the window closed, it was almost impossible to open it again unless political conditions shifted. It became clear from the experiences of the post–Cold War that there was a precious golden hour when aid could turn the tide of community stability if the types of interventions were well coordinated and addressed the central grievances of those in the targeted community.

OTI also pioneered a contracting mechanism that allowed it rapid and flexible mechanisms for working in conflict environments. SWIFT, Support Which Implements Fast Transitions, came into being during the early years and was revised in 2003. By prequalifying major development companies to work with OTI, this mechanism continues to give OTI a short window, just 72 hours, to receive proposals for any projects it proposes. Nothing in USAID’s bureaucracy had ever worked with the speed or efficiency that SWIFT afforded OTI.5

It was also OTI’s ability to partner with other organizations—humanitarian NGOs, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations, and other bilateral donors—that created a much more flexible and nuanced capacity for USAID to hit the ground running where timing of assistance was essentially a matter of preventing a recurrence of conflict. This was the case in Haiti, Colombia, and Sierra Leone.

In its first decade, a report written at Harvard’s Kennedy School concluded that “OTI’s strongest overall legacy is primarily what it has done to empower stakeholders. . . . OTI initiated important cross-societal and intra-societal conversations. This part of the OTI legacy is inherently intangible, but very real. Fostering inter-communal dialogue is fundamental to OTI operating procedures in a way that few other international assistance agencies can understand. . . . OTI’s particular legacies of success, country by country, are less important than what it has done to develop disparate citizens with which, and a renewed impetus, to look after themselves. A country’s own political will for transition is key.”6

**OTI’s Second Decade**

After ten years, OTI had shown that managing transitions required a creativity of approach, a willingness to take risks, and the motivation to take on politically charged issues that USAID had not always been comfortable addressing—especially the reintegration of ex-combatants, land-mine awareness and removal, civil-military relations, and more aggressive support of local media and advocacy. It also operated in a very hands-on manner, relying less on outsiders to manage projects and continuing to use its own staff of contractors to oversee field-based programs.

---


If the first decade was characterized by drafting the road maps to peace and implementing transition assistance, the second decade created a very different set of conditions. As one OTI director told me, “We had to be everywhere, and that is the big problem.” OTI was not alone. The military was put in the same boat, especially as the events after 9/11 led to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States was not only fighting against global terrorism but also struggling with the management of transnational problems, including illicit forms of trafficking in goods and people, criminal cartels, and navigating a world where borders had no meaning. OTI was expected to perform as part of a broader U.S. government assault on terror, while still being asked to help transitions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Congress established the Transition Initiatives Account (TI) in the 2001 Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act to provide “assistance to develop, strengthen, or preserve democratic institutions, and processes, revitalize basic infrastructure, and foster the peaceful resolution of conflict.” This memorialization of the OTI mission reflected not only the trust of lawmakers, but a realization that rapid civilian response capacity was needed to support U.S. efforts in unstable states critical to U.S. interests.

Two wars over the past decade received the lion’s share of OTI programming. Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, where OTI continues to operate today, received more than a billion dollars. OTI led the way in teaching other parts of USAID to work with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) that were central to the stabilization model in Iraq and Afghanistan. By 2005, many of USAID’s field leaders, along with OTI staff, were serving on the PRTs that became the central feature of work with communities in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

During this time, other countries like Sudan, Yemen, Haiti, Colombia, Kenya, and Sri Lanka also received OTI’s programming, reflecting the close to 25,000 activities managed by field staff in those states. Yet to date, OTI’s management of $2.5 billion since 1994 is but a small piece of the development investments that have been made in those countries. What is unique, however, was the speed at which the funds were disbursed and on-the-ground activities commenced to help stabilize these countries.

By 2010, OTI was on a course toward becoming the U.S. government’s main civilian responder, receiving funding and recognition across the government and in the military. It was no longer a “toy” with which development actors experimented in transition states; rather, it had become the tool that everyone had longed for at the end of the Cold War.

What Is the State of the Field Today?

In 1995, 35 countries were listed as having internal conflicts in which 45 million people died. There were almost an equal number of refugees and internally displaced persons. The creation of OTI in 1994 came not a moment too soon, as we saw the so-called peace

7. Personal communication, August 2014.
dividend that was to have occurred with the end of the Cold War evaporate into a new type of insecurity that required robust peace operations, humanitarian assistance, and transition programs to help stabilize weak and fragile states. In 2014, there are fewer internal wars, but the numbers of refugees and internally displaced are at an all-time high as conflict rages across the Middle East. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa are still experiencing a new kind of threat as stateless armies of criminal actors threaten the peace and security of many countries.\(^8\) Thus, a debate about what type of security is needed and how likely it is that conflicts will occur are subjects of intense scholarly discourse.

OTI has been engaged in this discussion since its creation through its own field-based experiences in some of the world’s most troubled and fragile states. Today, we take as a given the need to develop effective institutions that will help ensure that countries can rebuild. We have learned that state fragility is the greatest enemy of development. It has also become clear that U.S. foreign policy still has limited civilian tools to rely on once the military operations associated with ending conflicts are over.\(^9\)

One constant throughout these years has been that OTI has led the way in shaping an approach to stabilization and reconstruction programs—an approach that informed our own policy thinking and also influenced the way in which other institutions, from the United Nations to the World Bank and the Development Assistance Commission (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) define what roles outsiders can play in the rebuilding of war-torn societies. What started as an experiment two decades ago is now part of a larger universe of efforts to help put back the pieces of an ever-more complex world.

In 2014, we still face the problem of accepting how long it takes to build strong institutions, grow civil society, and restore economic growth. Foreign assistance budgets are developed in five-year bundles, yet reality tells us that state building is a 20-year task at a minimum. A generation is usually needed to see the results of stabilization and institution building, yet the high level of demand for the immediate resolution of conflict, often characterized by impatience and quick fixes, checking a box on a “to-do” list, fails to create a genuine understanding of how any short-term development interventions support a path to national development and a return to stable governance. When economist Paul Collier noted more than two decades ago that at least half of all interventions in the post-conflict period fail after seven years, he was really observing what we have described as the limits of the international community in building institutions without the building the trust and consensus of the beneficiary nation.\(^10\)


OTI at 20 provides three enduring lessons about development that are becoming commonplace in our work in difficult environments around the world.

- Having the right types of programs that reflect the consensus of the community is the key ingredient for success: local and national buy-in, and processes that support that approach.

- Having the right personnel who understand how to work quickly in difficult post-conflict environments is essential for effectiveness.

- Having contracting mechanisms where the operating principle is flexibility is what has allowed OTI to remain an office that is envied for its ability to get the job done quickly. Creative contracting has saved the day many times over the last two decades.

Even as the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan, there will still be a need for OTI’s approach to managing the conflicts and transitions that will continue to affect U.S. security interests. Although progress has been made in terms of coordination among U.S. government agencies, additional work needs to be done to ensure that the diplomacy, development, and defense triad can be responsive to new challenges that will inevitably arise in the years to come.\(^\text{11}\) What OTI’s program demonstrates is that civilian response is as important as a strong military when it comes to managing the global security environment.

About the Office of Transition Initiatives

Stephen Lennon

OTI, in USAID’s Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA), is pleased to celebrate 20 years of programming in transition and post-conflict settings in some of the most challenging yet critical regions of the globe. In partnership with local actors and other U.S. government counterparts, OTI has consistently provided a rapid and targeted response in countries undergoing ethnic strife, extremist violence, political upheaval, and recovery from recent unrest. These programs increase local and regional stability, foster democratic principles, bolster personal safety, jump-start local economic initiatives, and bring communities and governing structures closer together. In addition to managing intense country engagements, OTI collaborates as part of USAID country missions with the broader interagency to share lessons and help introduce innovative methods and approaches into other USAID or host government programming. Working with U.S. government counterparts, OTI has helped broaden the reach and responsive capacity of U.S.-funded programming addressing complex crises and transition settings.

With core funding from the Transition Initiatives (TI) account, OTI’s mission is to support U.S. foreign policy priorities by rapidly addressing critical emerging opportunities and threats affecting stability, peace, and democracy through local initiatives promoting responsive, adaptive, and agile political programming. After 20 years of providing critical programming addressing complex and sometimes seemingly intractable issues, OTI has grown into a mature organization that many rely upon to deliver innovative foreign assistance in high foreign policy-priority countries. With experience spanning over 60 country engagements and $2.5 billion supporting over 25,000 individualized activities since 1994, OTI continues to grow and learn and adapt its programming as new challenges arise. Programming has been tailored to strengthen civilian-led opposition in Syria, promote alternatives to extremism for youth in Pakistan, strengthen community-government relations in the Sahel, and reduce criminal violence in communities in Honduras. Looking ahead, OTI will continue to serve as a critical tool for laying the foundation for more sustainable development, push new frontiers as an incubator for new ideas, demonstrate the positive influence local actors can bring to solving local problems, and serve as a key rapid response resource strengthening U.S. foreign policy objectives.
OTI contributes to USAID’s overall mission to end extreme poverty and to promote resilient, democratic societies while advancing our security and prosperity. The Agency’s mission is increasingly concentrated in fragile countries and conflict-affected societies. OTI plays a fundamental role in enhancing the resilience of local communities and host governments to create and preserve the opportunity for longer-term development. Timely OTI interventions support locally envisioned initiatives that lay the groundwork for peace and stability, and also help communities cope with conflict and recovery through targeted assistance.

As the nature of international challenges facing the United States evolves, OTI will continue to adapt its engagement model and support structures. Building on the creative energy of its past programs and management, OTI has forged new tools and honed existing approaches to make its country engagements more effective and to increase positive political change in transition environments. In recent years, OTI has introduced regional-based support personnel, advanced mapping and data analytics, social media tools, web-based learning, and activity-tracking platforms for USAID country missions seeking to adopt OTI concepts and methodologies. These and other innovations help deliver more effective foreign assistance through constant adaptation to unexpected developments in the field. Since its inception, OTI has focused on finding local solutions to local problems, maximizing creativity, and taking calculated risks. This prioritization and orientation of field-based analysis, attuned to local dynamics, along with the devolution of authority to enable those closest to the ground to make quick decisions, continues to be a mainstay of OTI programming around the world.

OTI has developed and refined adaptive and agile programming in service of U.S. foreign policy to promote stability and democratic values to top U.S. foreign policy priority countries around the globe. As OTI commemorates its 20-year milestone, the office also looks ahead to expanding our collaboration within USAID and with U.S. government counterparts as we join forces to address political transitions and conflict challenges wherever they may arise. The rapid changes and instability emergent today require a comprehensive and effective response that brings people together to resolve differences peacefully and strengthens their ability to better overcome future potential conflict or strife. OTI celebrates two decades of action that continues to support positive change. Future success will be possible only through continued innovation, collaboration, and dedication to finding local solutions to pivotal crises.
About the Editors and Contributors

Robert D. Lamb is a visiting research professor at the U.S. Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute and a former director of the CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation. He studies development, governance, and conflict with an emphasis on complex crises, informal processes, hybrid political and economic systems, and donor effectiveness.

Johanna Mendelson Forman is a scholar in residence at American University’s School of International Service. She is a nonresident senior associate at CSIS and also serves as a senior adviser with the Managing Across Boundaries Program at the Stimson Center, where she works on transnational security threats and development issues.

Joy Aoun works for Resilient Recovery at the World Bank Group and is an adjunct fellow with the Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation at CSIS.

Scott Aughenbaugh is a deputy director of Strategic Futures at CSIS. He specializes in global trends analysis and forecasting, primarily for CSIS’s flagship presentation, “Seven Revolutions: Scanning the Horizon Out to the Year 2035 and Beyond.”

Ernest Bower is a senior adviser, holds the Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies, and is codirector of the Pacific Partners Initiative at CSIS.

Heather A. Conley is senior vice president for Europe, Eurasia, and the Arctic and director of the Europe Program at CSIS. Prior to joining CSIS in 2009, she served as executive director of the Office of the Chairman of the Board at the American National Red Cross and as deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau for European and Eurasian Affairs.

Richard Downie is deputy director and fellow with the Africa Program at CSIS. In this role, he analyzes emerging political, economic, social, and security trends in sub-Saharan Africa with the aim of informing U.S. policymakers, the U.S. military, and members of Congress.

Persis Khambatta is an adjunct fellow with the Wadhwani Chair in U.S.-India Policy Studies at CSIS. She is also currently a senior director with the BowerGroupAsia, a business advisory firm.
Andrew C. Kuchins is a senior fellow and director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at CSIS. He is an internationally known expert on Russian foreign and domestic policies who is frequently called on by business, government, media, and academic leaders.

Stephen Lennon is a practitioner in contingency operations, including post-conflict political transition and stability operations. He is currently the acting director for USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI).

Carl Meacham is director of the Americas Program at CSIS. He previously served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on the staff of two Democratic senators, at the Department of Commerce, at the Cuban Affairs Bureau of the Department of State, and at the U.S. embassy in Madrid.

Richard Rossow is a senior fellow and holds the Wadhwani Chair in U.S.-India Policy Studies at CSIS. Before joining CSIS, he spent 16 years in the private sector working to strengthen the partnership and business relationship between the United States and India.

Thomas M. Sanderson is codirector and senior fellow in the CSIS Transnational Threats Project, where he works on terrorism, transnational crime, global trends, Central Asia, and intelligence issues. With fieldwork across nearly 60 countries, Sanderson engages all manner of sources including extremists, insurgents, foreign intelligence officials, nongovernmental organizations, clergy, and academics.
Advances and Challenges in Political Transitions

What Will the Future of Conflict Look Like?

EDITORS
Robert D. Lamb
Johanna Mendelson Forman

A Report of the CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation

OCTOBER 2014

Cover photo: Freedom House.