

Just Security – JustSecurity.org

Global Fragility Act 2.0? Amid a Possible Bipartisan Revival, a Chance to Make U.S. Peace Efforts More Effective

By Peter J. Quaranto and Kevin Melton

Published on October 15, 2025

Bipartisan cooperation in Washington is hard to come by these days. But Republicans and Democrats are still finding common ground on one of America's most urgent security challenges: supporting countries where violence and instability fuel migration, empower malign actors, and open doors for U.S. adversaries. The common ground is in legislation setting up the next stage of the [Global Fragility Act](#) (GFA). In August, Senators Chris Coons (D-DE) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) [put forward](#) legislation that would reauthorize and strengthen the GFA. Representatives Sara Jacobs (D-CA) and Michael McCaul (R-TX) [introduced](#) a similar bill in the House, and the House Foreign Affairs Committee incorporated a portion of the legislation into its State Department [reauthorization package](#) that it [advanced](#) last month. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee may soon mark up the standalone bill. With Congress' initiative, clear vision, and adaptation, GFA could yet realize its full promise as a tool for stopping and preventing costly wars. That tool is increasingly needed in a world marked by increasing violence, [political instability](#), and [fragility](#).

This new wave of congressional engagement on GFA comes at a time when the law's implementation has effectively ground to a halt. The administration's dismantlement of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations [stripped away](#) the very expertise that was guiding GFA operations. The administration terminated or rescinded more than \$200 million in GFA-aligned funding as part of overall aid cuts. This halted dozens of active programs underway across Libya, Mozambique, the Pacific, and West Africa, putting major strains on some longstanding U.S. local partners. The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) shelved its related plans to stand up a fragility-focused unit to help expand into and reduce the risk for U.S. companies of entering frontier markets.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio's reorganization plan for the department, [as submitted](#) to Congress, stipulated that leadership of GFA would shift to the retooled Office of Foreign Assistance Oversight, and several administration officials assured Congress at [hearings](#) of their commitment to GFA. However, three months later, that office has not yet provided any guidance internally or externally about what comes next. Further, the administration has not made clear whether it will pursue spending of the GFA-aligned funds appropriated by Congress for fiscal year 2025, which are core to implementation and would expire if unspent after September 2026.

Amid these changes, it is easy to forget that GFA was signed into law by President Donald Trump in 2019. The law's bipartisan sponsors hoped the measure would prompt more disciplined U.S. engagement and targeted aid in regions experiencing increasing levels of instability and fragility. It was rooted in [lessons learned](#) from Afghanistan, Iraq, and other costly interventions where the United States pursued overly militarized approaches, injected massive aid resources, and did not confront local political dynamics driving instability. Those were mistakes the United States cannot afford to forget or repeat.

Before departing office, the Trump administration released the required [strategy](#) for implementing the GFA. The strategy elevated prevention and diplomacy, calling for U.S. leadership to strengthen locally owned political processes and political agreements that address the root causes of conflict and bring in international partners such as European donors and international financial institutions to coordinate and share financial responsibility. This strategy was one of the few the incoming Biden team chose to continue, reflecting the bipartisan underpinnings of the GFA approach.

A Unified Plan Across Departments

As former officers at the State Department and USAID, respectively, we helped design and lead GFA implementation across the administrations. Despite the challenges to overcome bureaucratic tensions and the slow movement – all of which can be addressed (more on that later) – we saw how it was driving important reforms in the U.S. national security establishment, including within the Department of Defense. In our experience, U.S. national security agencies have often worked well in responding to acute crises such as an infectious disease outbreak or a terrorist attack. But we frequently struggled to work together to pursue longer-term, preventative goals such as trying to help foreign partners manage emerging threats or stopping inroads by malign actors or strategic competitors. GFA was beginning to change that. It was [providing](#) a roadmap for getting U.S. diplomacy, defense, and finance efforts moving in the same direction, guided by a unified plan, approach, and metrics. And, importantly, it was helping us think strategically about how to combine efforts to reduce instability with opening doors for U.S. economic cooperation and investment.

We saw the greatest example of GFA's promise in Coastal West Africa – a region where fragility creates both real security threats and strategic competition with China and Russia. There, GFA enabled the U.S. government to move quickly to help coastal partners confront growing risks of extremist groups spilling over from the Sahel – long before these risks were making [international news headlines](#) this year. Starting in 2022, the United States began to mobilize and align funds to improve cooperation between governments, security forces, and border communities across coastal nations. This translated into new or expanded programs that trained police, helped governments expand basic services to vulnerable populations (including by registering children without birth certificates and providing identification cards), and strengthened local dispute-resolution mechanisms. African nations like Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana committed their own resources, Germany and other partners joined, and the Coastal States

Stability Mechanism was [launched](#). As documented in a [report](#) submitted to Congress in January, these programs were starting to show early results. Evaluations and surveys showed notable increases in the local populations' trust in security forces, decreased inter-communal conflicts, and reduced support for violent extremism in targeted border areas.

Mozambique provides another case of GFA's early impact. There, GFA was supporting new approaches to improve governance and address the drivers of instability in conflict-affected areas and [unlock](#) potential for U.S. investment, especially involving energy resources. GFA efforts in Mozambique were helping to reduce instability in the country's northern region, where the U.S. is financing liquified natural gas (LNG) production projects. These projects [could](#) ultimately support tens of thousands of American jobs at U.S. LNG suppliers. Yet, without stability and Mozambican communities feeling they are benefiting from their own resources, terrorism will persist and U.S. investment will be lost to Chinese state-owned enterprises that are willing to operate in unstable environments. With the GFA, the United States was bringing together the government of Mozambique, international donors and private companies like ExxonMobil, with local leaders, to drive concrete progress. Earlier this year, we had begun to discuss how this model could be applied in other places like the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to help support the peace agreement that was eventually [signed](#) at the State Department and catalyze further American investment.

Revive What's Working, Improve the Rest

Congress' initiative to reauthorize the GFA now provides a chance to resurrect and strengthen what was working with the initiative, as well as improve what was not. "GFA 2.0" must be leaner, faster, and more accountable – a transformation, not just a restart. Realizing GFA's full promise requires bold adaptations [based](#) on learning.

First, Congress and the administration should codify clear criteria for which and what kinds of countries to focus on, so that U.S. efforts are concentrated where reform is possible, host governments are committed, and investments can be sustained. This ensures resources are not wasted in contexts where conditions simply are not right. Congressional champions have – rightly, in our view – emphasized the limitations of directing GFA toward contexts not yet ready for structured government-to-government partnerships, such as Haiti. The administration should consider alternative tools and approaches for engaging in those unstable environments where foundational progress is needed before formal partnerships can take hold.

Second, GFA 2.0 should institutionalize regional models. The experience with Coastal West Africa has shown the value of thinking and operating regionally. Regionalized initiatives in the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, or the Red Sea region could multiply impact and allow the U.S. to get ahead of instability before it metastasizes.

Third, GFA 2.0 should include an “on-ramp” for emerging partnership opportunities – a flexible mechanism to provide early support to countries experiencing fragile transitions, ceasefires, or peace deals. This would allow the U.S. to seize rare windows of opportunity without waiting for years-long planning cycles. The on-ramp process would ultimately help determine whether conditions are ripe for committing to a longer-term structured partnership. There could be lessons from the Millennium Challenge Corporation’s threshold programs, which help countries prepare for full MCC compacts. But the key is flexibility: Congress should unify fragmented contingency resources, such as the Complex Crisis Fund, Transition Initiatives, and GFA allocations into a single adaptable pool. That would ensure the United States can seize fragile but rare windows of opportunity without delay.

Fourth, to guide GFA 2.0, the United States should rebuild a dedicated hub of expertise in conflict analysis, planning, and program management. Without professional staff supporting embassies and implementers, GFA risks being a law without capacity to deliver. This hub should be small, empowered, and directly connected to decision-makers in Washington and in the field.

Fifth, GFA 2.0 should minimize process-heavy bureaucracy and instead streamline a unified approach to planning and implementing the initiative in priority regions. Policymakers in Washington need to set the overall priorities – informed by analytics and overriding foreign policy goals – and ensure all resources are integrated toward them. Then, with that guidance, embassy teams should be given more authority to act, take calculated risks, and deliver results. Evaluation should prioritize learning and accountability, not compliance checklists.

Sixth and finally, GFA 2.0 should integrate development finance and private-sector engagement from the beginning. Stability should pave the way for partnerships that derisk investments for U.S. businesses and expand access to capital to bolster local economies, create jobs, and build resilience. This is not just important for reducing fragility and mitigating threats; it is about mobilizing finance, trade, and innovation alongside prevention to create pathways for successful U.S. business investments that can create mutual benefits. Standing up the DFC’s “fragility unit” should be a priority, and that unit should be fully integrated into GFA implementation.

The congressional legislation to reauthorize the GFA can provide the impetus for making these adaptations to realize act’s promise. Just as importantly, Congress’ efforts are showing once again that GFA’s vision can bring Republicans and Democrats together. The question is whether and how administration leaders will leverage what GFA represents and what it offers. Will they commit to use the funds Congress has appropriated for this initiative and take the first steps to renew and refocus implementation? If the administration seizes this moment, GFA 2.0 can provide a valuable tool for the president’s goals of stopping – even preventing – costly wars, competing effectively with rivals, and opening fragile but vital markets to U.S. businesses. At a time when war and instability abroad directly fuels threats at home, allowing GFA to falter would squander a much-needed tool. To let that bipartisan vision wither would be a costly mistake.

FEATURED IMAGE: A mother walks with her daughters in the community of Saul, in the Metuge region, in the Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique, on March 26, 2024. The Pulo village was attacked by insurgents on March 6, 2024 where they burned 30 houses, the school and the material they had. During the attack they killed 9 people, one of them was one of the students of the school. The residents of Pulu village are now taking refuge in nearby villages and at a resettlement centre in Metuge. (Photo by JUAN LUIS ROD/AFP via Getty Images)
