Hello and welcome to another episode of *A Deeper Look* podcast. I'm Patrick Fine, CEO of FHI 360. One of the things I love about *A Deeper Look* is that it gives me the opportunity to speak with some of the most thoughtful and effective leaders working in international development.

Today, our topic is peacebuilding and humanitarian response. And I have the great privilege of having Nancy Lindborg, President of the United States Institute of Peace, as my guest. Nancy, welcome to *A Deeper Look*.

Thank you, Patrick. Delighted to be here.

Listeners, before we dive into the substance of today's discussion, now is the time to subscribe to this podcast on SoundCloud, iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. That way, you won't miss an episode. After you listen, please post comments. I've received some terrific, thought-provoking comments. So, I'd love to hear from you.

Now as our loyal listeners know, we're focusing this year on humanitarian crises and emergency response. And today's topic on peacebuilding is critical to exploring how to prevent and mitigate crises or use our responses in ways to help build more sustainable solutions.

No one is better suited to address this topic than Nancy Lindborg. Since 2015, Nancy has served as President of the United States Institute of Peace, an independent institution founded by Congress to provide practical solutions — emphasis on practical — for preventing and resolving violent conflict around the world.

Before that, she was at USAID as the Assistant Administrator in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, where she focused on building resilience, managing and mitigating conflict, and providing urgent humanitarian assistance. She led USAID's responses in the ongoing Syria crisis, the droughts in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, the Ebola response and numerous other global crises.

And before USAID, Nancy was President of Mercy Corps, one of the most important humanitarian response organizations in the world. So, there is really nobody better suited to talk about this topic. So, without further ado, let's get started.
Nancy Lindborg: Happy to get going.

Patrick Fine: Great.

Nancy Lindborg: Thanks, Patrick.

Patrick Fine: So first, before I ask you about the work of USIP, and peacebuilding and how that relates to or interacts with humanitarian response, I bet our listeners would like to know what got you into the humanitarian sphere in the first place.

Nancy Lindborg: That's a good question. You know, I was on track with my literature degree, to getting a PhD and being an English professor.

Patrick Fine: There you go. English majors.

Nancy Lindborg: English majors unite! I'm a big fan. But I got sidetracked through a trip to Nepal. It changed my life. And I became acquainted with a whole different world. I encountered the Tibetan refugees and started working on those issues.

And it just changed my life. I ended up living and working both in Nepal and then in Central Asia. And then when I joined Mercy Corps in the mid-90s, that put me on a road not just working on international development, but also the humanitarian issues.

And starting with the Kosovo and the Bosnia Wars, it's been pretty much a focus on all the great crises of the last 23 years.

Patrick Fine: So, I know you've been traveling to many areas over the last year where there are ongoing conflicts or other humanitarian crises. What is the role of USIP? What takes you to those areas?

Nancy Lindborg: Sure. Well, as you said in the intro, USIP is mandated to look at what are the very practical ways that we can more effectively prevent and resolve violent conflict. And we work to connect research, best practice, with policy and application on the ground where we work with partners to equip them to do a better job. And we have the guiding light that there will always be conflict. Wherever there are humans, there will be conflict.

Patrick Fine: So, it goes with our species.

Nancy Lindborg: It goes with our species. But that well-managed conflict can actually be transformational. And we see this in our country, some
of the great movements, civil rights, women's rights, environmental, I mean it's changed our country for the better. But when that conflict becomes violent is when it tears apart families, communities and countries.

And, my office looks out at the Lincoln Memorial, which is really a daily reminder of what happened in our country where conflict did not get well-managed and ended up tearing our country apart.

Patrick Fine: Right. You mentioned research. Do you create or produce evidence to look at what kinds of actions will help to prevent or mitigate crises?

Nancy Lindborg: Yes. Both through the work of experts on our team and through grants and fellowships to PhD students, we look at the kind of research that helps provide that evidence basis. Now for example, we have a whole practice area on nonviolent civil resistance.

And Maria Stefan on our team has been one of the leaders in documenting that you actually have more durable peaceful change when it occurs through nonviolence, and that when it moves into violence is when you have a greater likelihood that you'll revolve back into conflict.

And then there's a whole suite of very practical tools that we train on how to have those kinds of movements be more cohesive and that when those movements are more broadly inclusive is when you have a better chance of actually having positive change.

Patrick Fine: Right. You know, I'm curious about the tools. Years ago, I was working in the Casamance region of Senegal, where there was a long-going conflict.

And we tried to. Working with the Senegalese, there was an effort to understand the roots of the conflict and why it so often would get close to resolution and then it would not resolve. And one of the theories that people had at the time was that the communities involved in the conflict had become so entrenched in their positions that they didn't have skillsets to compromise.

Nancy Lindborg: Yes.

Patrick Fine: Compromise was seen as a weakness and as a negative attribute. So, if somebody was a proponent of compromise, they would be sidelined and would not be able to be in a leadership position
where they could actually negotiate some sort of resolution.

So, one of the things we tried at the time was to bring the parties together to build skills around how do you negotiate agreements that involve compromise where there is give and take. Would that be an example of the kind of tool you all promote?

*Nancy Lindborg:* Absolutely. I mean we use a whole variety of types of dialogue, processes, negotiation, mediation. I mean these are all the building blocks of how you build peace. It's also very important, and you eluded to it, that it's an inclusive process, because often it's who is not at the table that determines whether the peace process will be successful or not.

And we've actually be doing research on that. Sometimes it's the people who have the skills to compromise, but often it's also all the people who aren't the guys with the guns.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Nancy Lindborg:* You know, the women or the victims of the conflict or, you know, ethnic groups who are the most oppressed. And when you don't bring them to the table, you often don't end up with the kind of solution that actually creates a pathway to peace.

But one other point that it's really important, and that is it can't only be a top down process. That if you've got a more top down mediation or negotiation going on, it's got to be connected to the communities that are often deeply scarred by years of conflict.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Nancy Lindborg:* And those grievances and divides need to be addressed as well.

*Patrick Fine:* I want to touch on the point of the role of women in resolving conflict. I have two examples in my past. One in the Casamance and one in northern Uganda, in the Karamoja region, where you had groups that were in conflict. They'd been in conflict for years and years and years. And there was a government-led effort in both countries to try to broker a resolution amongst the warring parties. And instrumental in reaching some cessation of conflict and some agreements at the community level — so the agreements weren't at a high level, they were amongst elders in communities — was the role of women where the elders, the men who were the negotiators, sort of got to a point where they weren't making progress. And
then it was women from the communities who were able to — in both those cases — who were instrumental in getting agreements reached and adhered to by the communities. Have you seen that?

_Nancy Lindborg:_ Well, absolutely, and plus there's research that tells us that when women are a part of the peace process, they're at the table, that their participation is more likely to lead to an agreement that will sustain. There's a 30 percent increase in the probability that that peace accord will last 15 years or more.

And then we've also got the wonderful stories in places like Liberia, commemorated in Abby Disney's beautiful movie, _Pray the Devil Back to Hell_, where the women basically barricaded the men in the room and said you're not coming out until you have a peace agreement. And, you know, why is this? It's because women often are those who bear the brunt of a conflict.

_Patrick Fine:_ Right.

_Nancy Lindborg:_ And so, they have a greater investment in reaching a deal that will bring stability back to the community.

_Patrick Fine:_ Right. They're the caretakers often of the communities. So, looking not just at your work at USIP, but more broadly at the work you've done across the span of your career, how do you see peacebuilding interacting with humanitarian response and what do you see as the differences between pure peacebuilding kinds of activities and humanitarian response activities? Because I think they get confused sometimes.

_Nancy Lindborg:_ I think about it this way. If you spend a lot of your life going to places that have been bombed or destroyed by natural disasters, you know, where families are displaced and people are living in terrible conditions, at some point, you have to start asking, how do we prevent these things from happening?

Because you can alleviate the suffering, but it's really soul-sucking to go over and over again to these kinds of places. And even in the last four years since I left USAID, we have seen a steep increase in the amount of need for humanitarian assistance. The U.S. budget has gone up something like a factor of four.

_Patrick Fine:_ Right.
And we're seeing these historic levels of people who are displaced by conflict. And you've probably heard the statistic that a decade ago, 80 percent of the international humanitarian budget went to victims of natural disasters. And a decade later, that is flipped and 80 percent of assistance now goes to victims of violent conflict.

*Patrick Fine:* In fact, across the episodes of this series, the speakers that have shared their perspective have all made the point that right now, it's conflict that is driving the need for humanitarian response and that that's different than it was in the past.

*Nancy Lindborg:* It's conflict, and it's conflict that's concentrated in a handful of states where you have states that have the worst governments, that are the most illegitimate in the eyes of their citizens, or just unable to provide essential services.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Nancy Lindborg:* If you take those top most fragile states, you have a really strong correlation with the top states for sources of violent extremism, sources of refugees and migrants, and where we have the possibility of famine or the presence of civil wars or violent conflict.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Nancy Lindborg:* So, if you're wanting to get ahead of this terrible increase in the need for humanitarian assistance and the increase in suffering and displacement, you have to start looking at the how do you address this fundamental fragility that is highly associated with all of these causes of humanitarian need. How do you we do business differently with both development, with provision of humanitarian assistance, and fundamentally how do we connect these efforts with our diplomatic and security approaches?

*Patrick Fine:* But if we think of those states, place like Syria, Sudan, Central African Republic …

*Nancy Lindborg:* Yemen.

*Patrick Fine:* Somalia, Yemen …

*Nancy Lindborg:* Iraq, Afghanistan.
Patrick Fine: The prevention activities, it would seem to me, are heavily oriented towards some sort of political process. That it's a political process that is going to lead to some resolution or some stabilization of the situation.

Whereas on the humanitarian side, the principles of humanitarian response are not to be politically driven, but to be neutral. So, how do you resolve that tension between prevention, having to address the political interests, equities, grievances, and the humanitarian response side, which may be happening side by side …

Nancy Lindborg: Right.

Patrick Fine: … needing to have a level of neutrality?

Nancy Lindborg: In my experience, often, humanitarian assistance is the only thing moving on the chessboard. Because you get a sense that action is happening. And, you know, many courageous people, both members of the affected communities, aid workers, are doing an amazing job of saving lives, but there's not always a commensurate level of activity on the political side.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Nancy Lindborg: And so, one thing that needs to happen is there needs to be a greater call for political action when there is a grave humanitarian crisis. South Sudan comes to mind.

You know, which is this enormous bleeding wound. Half the country is displaced. There's not really an active, ongoing political process right now.

Patrick Fine: Right. Right.

Nancy Lindborg: I mean there are moves and fits and starts and, you know, we are without a U.S. special envoy right now. And U.S. leadership matters greatly in a lot of these instances. So, that's one issue.

Patrick Fine: Well and that would be a good example of where the lack of political process or efforts by the international community to engage politically to stabilize the situation results in increased demand for humanitarian response. Because in South Sudan, at least right now, there's no clear end in sight to that conflict.
Nancy Lindborg: I mean you have talks going on, it's kind of a sputtering process, and ultimately, you need the region to really engage.

I do think that U.S. global leadership matters a great deal, both in terms of our ability to provide assistance but also the need for us to provide the kind of political leadership that creates pressures and incentives and demands for movement on peace discussions.

Patrick Fine: Right. Well and, at least from my perspective, it looks like there is a stepping back from U.S. leadership. That the current administration is trying to step back and not be the default actor to bring parties to the table.

Nancy Lindborg: Well, I think there's an understandable desire for there to be international burden sharing. That is not a new sentiment in the American public. At the same time, there's a very distinct role for the U.S. voice and the U.S. leadership in terms of the moral authority that we traditionally have been able to bring to some of these processes and the leadership that we have historically provided.

But back to your question about the political and the humanitarian.

The other area that I think there's an opportunity for greater progress is that there be an alignment of goals. And that we ensure that our security and our political objectives are aligning with the goal of creating the conditions for people to go home, for people to be suffering less. Sometimes we have differing long-term or short-term objectives.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Nancy Lindborg: And a good example is in Afghanistan where USIP partnered with Stanford University and Chatham House to do a 10-year retrospective of a lot of investment in Afghanistan to try to bring that country out of conflict. And …

Patrick Fine: Investment in stabilization …

Nancy Lindborg: Investment …

Patrick Fine: … and reconstruction?

Nancy Lindborg: A whole …
**Patrick Fine:** That kind of investment?

**Nancy Lindborg:** Plus, plus. And what we learned, and this was with a lot of participation of the Afghan, European, American colleagues who had worked on this, is that we actually had three separate lines of effort. We had the intel effort that was hunting Al Qaeda. We had the military effort that was fighting the Taliban. And, then we had all the humanitarian and development effort that was trying to reduce suffering and rebuild the state.

**Patrick Fine:** Right.

**Nancy Lindborg:** And they actually collided with one another.

**Patrick Fine:** Right.

**Nancy Lindborg:** Because it wasn't a shared understanding of the goals we were pursuing.

**Patrick Fine:** Yeah, or a clear setting of shared objectives.

Speaking of Afghanistan, one of the drivers of that conflict, and I think it has grown stronger over the years, is violent extremism, particularly now with the Islamic State having a presence in the country or now engaging in that conflict and bringing a very brutal kind of indiscriminate killing of civilians trying to destabilize the country through the killing of civilians.

How do you build peace when you're dealing with an actor who has no regard for human life?

**Nancy Lindborg:** I think you have to take each one of these with the very specific contextual information about where they work, who are they recruiting, what's the environment. So, you've got the Taliban, which you've seen as you said, the incursion now of ISIS affiliates.

**Patrick Fine:** Right.

**Nancy Lindborg:** You know, it's different in Nigeria, with Boko Haram. And it's different with Al Shabaab or ISIS in Iraq.

**Patrick Fine:** So, Al Shabaab in Somalia.

**Nancy Lindborg:** In Somalia.
Nancy Lindborg: But what we're also seeing is because of the ability of people to move more freely across boundaries as well as social media, that they can more quickly become connected. So, you have to think about it both as, you know, these transboundary social media problems, but also deeply rooting in local context and really think about it and attack it in both of those realms.

Patrick Fine: It would seem to me the addressing the local context in some ways is more doable because it's more tangible. You can try to understand by studying the antecedents of what the grievances are, what the injustices are, that are driving people to violence. Or, what the call to glory is that is attracting people to violence.

What do you see as the causes of violent extremism?

Nancy Lindborg: I think there is a growing consensus that the root of extremism is based on communities where people feel excluded. They don't have a voice in their future. They don't have a hope in their future. It's highly associated with fragile settings where they don't have an opportunity to participate in the political or social or economic life of that community. There are, of course, many instances in which they're more – there are wealthy or more educated adherents.

But they are often in places where they don't feel like they see a just and hopeful future vis-a-vis the government.

And we're also seeing that, where people are particularly ill-educated or illiterate, that they are more vulnerable to the predations of extremists who provide them with interpretations of their religion.

And so, it really gets at this correlation between highly fragile states, which are either repressive, illegitimate or just incapable. If you want to tackle the root of extremism and people who are vulnerable to being recruited by extremists, you've got to begin looking at that.

Patrick Fine: Well, I just wonder, even for communities that aren't so excluded, where they may be pretty normal communities in terms of their economic life relative to the area they live in, if the penetration of social media creates a vehicle for manipulating people's perception ...

Nancy Lindborg: Absolutely.
Patrick Fine: … of what is just and of what their situation is so that it creates grievances. It nurtures grievances that then result in people becoming recruits into these violent movements.

Nancy Lindborg: I mean I think it's both. It's people who are vulnerable to be recruited because the extremists are offering them sometimes very tangible opportunities. I'll pay you.

Patrick Fine: Right. Right.

Nancy Lindborg: You get a wife. You get a job. I saw that a lot in northern Nigeria. But it's also oftentimes offering an opportunity to be a part of an exciting opportunity that's bigger than you are. It's a vision of entering into something exciting and meaningful that you may not otherwise have in your life.

You know there is research that says that the same kind of impulses enable people to be recruited into insurrections as into extremist groups. Which is all about fighting for something that is bold and bigger than yourself.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Nancy Lindborg: It's fundamentally about enabling folks to live in an environment where both basic needs are met and they have a vision of their lives as moving forward in a way that feels meaningful to them.

Patrick Fine: Do you think that there are approaches that can be effective in countering violent extremism through the same social media methods that are used to promote violent extremism? So, at USIP, do you do work with social media? Do you look at that dimension? You can't see this, listeners, but Nancy is shaking her head yes. So, what do you do at USIP?

Nancy Lindborg: So, three years ago, we spun off a partner entity as a 501(c)(3) called PeaceTech Lab. All of our media data and technology work. And it's basically creating those tools that enable technology to be used in more peaceful ways. Because what we're seeing is that technology is neutral, right? It can be used for good or it can be used for evil.

Patrick Fine: Thank you for saying that.

Nancy Lindborg: So, how do you create a greater emphasis on the use for good? Some of the work that PeaceTech Lab does is things like tracking
hate speech in South Sudan or in Burma, as well as enabling peace tech entrepreneurs to come up with ways to apply peace technology very tangibly in the lives of conflict-affected communities.

*Patrick Fine:* It seems to me that this brings us to a very difficult place where on one hand you have malign actors who have very well-defined and increasingly well-honed strategies for creating dissatisfaction, creating grievance and recruiting people into violent causes. Creating the perception that the only way to respond to these grievances is through joining this violent movement. And, that takes very proactive measures. So, targeting measures, a lot of thought into constructing messages that can manipulate people's emotions. So, it's very deliberate.

One might posit that you need an equally effective set of deliberate actions through social media to counter it, but that then, in a free society, starts to worry me about having a government or some other actor, some institution, putting out messages that are intended to manipulate people's perceptions, even if the intention is to manipulate them for good.

*Nancy Lindborg:* Right. Well this is obviously a very live debate that's going on in our country right now.

But let me bring it back to a very specific example, because I was just in Iraq. And this is a country that was the incubator of ISIS, which is a terrible scourge right now that is still being battled. But, the roots of that were in the Sunni members of that society who felt terribly, terribly disenfranchised and excluded from the Maliki government.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Nancy Lindborg:* And, you know, you can very directly trace back those who started the ISIS movement to terrible exclusionary government in Iraq.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Nancy Lindborg:* So, what's interesting in the conversation right now in Iraq is that there is a recognition of that. You know, we've defeated ISIS militarily in terms of territory in Iraq, but it's still very present. The ideology is still very present in …

*Patrick Fine:* In communities.
Nancy Lindborg: In seeds around …

Patrick Fine: Yeah.

Nancy Lindborg: And, this is sort of the fundamentals, Conflict 101, that when you have an exclusionary government and huge groups, or groups in general, are excluded from opportunity and participation, you sow the seeds for violent conflict. You sow the seeds for the potential of people being recruited into extremist ideologies.

Patrick Fine: Looking at a situation like Iraq, or Syria next door or Yemen, it's clear that those communities are also being influenced and affected by external forces, external to the community, external to the country, so you've got a lot of different interests.

Nancy Lindborg: Yes.

Patrick Fine: Some whose interest is to see conflict perpetuated. Others who would like to see the conflict end but with a clear winner, with one side dominating another. Are you and your collaborators at USIP looking at strategies that take into consideration the complexity of the conflicts that we face today?

Nancy Lindborg: Always, and they're always complicated. And, you know, in fact we're seeing that some of these civil wars are increasingly becoming internationalized and lasting longer as a result. Syria being the prime example.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Nancy Lindborg: So, a couple of strategies. One is the importance of connecting high-level policy moves, diplomatic national government kind of approaches, with ways that you create reconciliation at the community level. If you don't have both, you don't create the stronger, more resilient country that can withstand the kind of influences and the kind of predations that come in from regional or international interests. And of course, you know, we're talking at a time where there's an increased level of great power competition and regional competition. In Iraq, for example, you have Turkey, you have the Gulf, you have Iran, you have the U.S., all with interests. But the difference between Iraq and Syria, I would argue, where you have Syria with a similar set of conflicting interests, is that it is in everybody's interest for Iraq to be stable and it is in everybody's interest to not have a re-emergence of ISIS.
Patrick Fine: Doesn't a lot of it come down to individuals, to particular leaders, and whether those leaders rise to the occasion?

Nancy Lindborg: It always does. I would just amend that by saying it's leadership at every level.

So often, the kind of leadership that occurs at a community level matters deeply because it enables people to go home and then those people can vote.

And USIP is working with tribal, religious and local governmental leaders in half a dozen communities around Iraq to create local peace accords because, you know, oftentimes, when you've got in this case, the rollback of ISIS, what it leaves behind is a very fractured community and a lot of local grievances. And so, there needs to be processes for reknitting the social infrastructure as much as you have to rebuild the physical infrastructure.

Patrick Fine: And that goes back to your earlier point about bottom-up action.

Nancy Lindborg: Absolutely.

Patrick Fine: And community-level action being essential to broader resolution of conflict and crisis.

Nancy Lindborg: And for sustaining the peace.

Patrick Fine: For sustaining the peace.

Let me ask you one final question, Nancy. Looking ahead, we've talked about technology, we've talked about community action, we've talked about the role of national and multinational actors, all having roles to play in building and sustaining a more peaceful world. What's missing? Right now, if you survey the landscape, are there major pieces that are missing?

Nancy Lindborg: You know, if I were Queen of the Universe, I would have some mechanism to hold people accountable who are completely abusing their people.

You know. So, with sovereignty, I believe should come greater responsibility. But for all kinds of reasons, it's a very difficult tool to build.
There was a big effort around responsibility to protect some years ago as a UN, if not legal convention, at least to be a more broadly accepted norm.

**Patrick Fine:** Well, the International Criminal Court does some of that – and in Kosovo and Bosnia, there has been some accountability for actions that leaders took there. Is that the sort of thing you’re talking about?

**Nancy Lindborg:** That’s one aspect of it. But that’s long after usually atrocities have been committed. It doesn’t enable you to stop horrible things from continuing to happen. You know, as we’re seeing in certain countries right now where it just goes on and on, you … all you can do is provide humanitarian assistance often. Because there aren’t legal grounds for doing anything else.

**Patrick Fine:** Well and, if anything, we’re probably at the moment in terms of international occurrence where there’s less support for say a rapid intervention to prevent something like the Rwanda genocide. So, after that occurred, there was a soul searching and …

**Nancy Lindborg:** Right. And a responsibility to protect was really vigorously championed by the Canadians, as you recall.

**Patrick Fine:** Right. And there was some consensus amongst the international community that there had been a failure and that there should have been an intervention to protect people from that genocide.

**Nancy Lindborg:** But what I do see, hopefully emerging, is a growing consensus on how to get ahead of all of these crises and this whole issue of state fragility that we’ve discussed, this illegitimacy and lack of capacity, where there is a growing consensus that you need to enable states to be more inclusive, to be more responsive to their citizens if you want to prevent the kind of violent conflict and extremism that is increasingly concentrated in this group of states where about a billion people live. By the way, where the greatest levels of extreme poverty are.

**Patrick Fine:** Right.

**Nancy Lindborg:** And that if we don’t think more effectively about our development, humanitarian security and diplomatic capabilities, working together on that problem set, we will not get ahead of all of these other problems that emanate from these fragile countries.
Patrick Fine: So, that's the macro view and that is a great place to end this conversation. Because I think you do sketch out a vision for an integrated approach of diplomacy, development and security that has to act with state actors, with institutions, and at the community level to build the capacities that will allow conflict resolution, allow the kind of peacebuilding activities we've been talking about.

Nancy Lindborg: And to put those peacebuilding tools in the hands of people at every level.

Patrick Fine: Yes.

Nancy Lindborg: Citizens to the governments. And just to put a note of hope in, we believe very strongly at USIP that peace is both practical but it's very possible and it happens all the time and it's a process that requires citizen action and citizen responsibility, each of us.

Patrick Fine: Nancy, thanks so much for a terrific conversation. I know our listeners are going to benefit from this. Now, I follow you on Twitter, and I encourage all of our listeners who want an informed voice on development to follow Nancy. And I want to thank our listeners, both new and returning, for caring about these issues. I'd love to hear what you think about this discussion. So, send your comments on SoundCloud or iTunes. Leave us a review. You can also listen to previous episodes of A Deeper Look. And stay tuned, we've got some other great episodes coming up through the rest of the year. Nancy, thanks again.

Nancy Lindborg: Great to be with you, Patrick.