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Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer

State failure and state building

Daniel Lambach and Tobias Debiel

For a few years, it has been *en vogue* to speak of failed and fragile states as threats to security (see, for example Mallaby 2002; Rotberg 2002). Western policymakers tend to emphasize the global-level dangers of state failure, while NGOs and representatives of developing countries highlight its impact at the regional, national, and local levels. Thus, it is imperative to ask 'whose security' (Baldwin 1997: 12) we are talking about.

For the purposes of this chapter, 'state failure' is defined as the inability of a state to provide security and public goods to its citizens; to collect taxes; and to formulate, implement and enforce policies and laws. It is acknowledged that the term 'state failure' can be somewhat misleading, since what is considered 'failure' can also be construed as an ongoing project of constructing patterns of political order that do not necessarily conform to Western notions of statehood. This semantic issue aside, state failure, however it is conceptualized, is a highly salient security issue on a number of levels.

In the following section, a definition of state failure and some theoretical background is provided. Subsequently, current trends of state failure and the results of research into its causes are presented. The third section details the security implications of state failure at the global, regional and national/local levels. The final section concludes by discussing the promises and shortcomings of state building as a strategy to overcome state fragility.

Old and new forms of statehood

Research on state failure requires a definition of statehood. Baker and Ausink provide a helpful definition that can serve as a stepping stone:

> We define state as a political entity that has legal jurisdiction and physical control over a defined territory, the authority to make collective decisions for a permanent population, a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, and a government that interacts or has the capacity to interact in formal relations with other such entities.
>
> (Baker and Ausink 1996: 4)

This definition represents an ideal-type understanding of consolidated statehood. However, it is quite clear that most states outside the industrialized countries of the OECD world (and even some of those countries) do not meet the above criteria. To describe this phenomenon, studies place states along a continuum of consolidated (strong), fragile (weak), failing, failed and collapsed statehood (or some variation thereof).

Research into state failure *sui generis* has only started fairly recently. When several fragile states, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Cambodia or Haiti descended into long-lasting and brutal civil wars in the late 1980s and early 1990s, analysts were prompted to focus on the institutional settings that contributed to the outbreak of these conflicts. Quickly, the term 'failed state' (Helman and Ratner 1992) emerged to describe these polities. Since then, research into the topic has increased dramatically, fuelled not least by greater political interest since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

While the history of research into state failure is rather short, the history of state failure itself is anything but short. Even if one restricts oneself to post-colonial times, there are numerous instances of state failure that precede the end of the Cold War, from Congo-Kinshasa in the early 1960s to Uganda, Chad and Lebanon in the 1970s. The rather obvious point is that state failure was not an innovation of the 1990s. The less obvious point is that state failure has deep historical roots that have to be taken into account – the failure of Zaire in the 1990s cannot be understood without the collapse of the fledgling state in 1960. By viewing these crises in their historical context, it becomes possible not to portray them as 'breakdowns', but to focus on continuities and transformations. Thus, some authors even argue that what is seen as failure is in reality an ongoing process of state formation (Ayoob 1995).

There are other critiques of the concept that are worth mentioning. For instance, some authors have argued that the developmental state may to some degree be both weak and strong at the same time. Referring to Callaghy's (1987) concept of the 'lame leviathan', they juxtapose the state's substantial coercive apparatus with its general inability to provide public goods or to implement its policies. A situation in which the state is unable to extend its reach beyond urban core regions and to regulate social relations (Migdal 1988: 7) works rather well for the self-enrichment of politico-bureaucratic elites that have managed to 'capture' the state.

Another critique is that concepts of state failure and state formation inevitably share a more or less teleological outlook with the Weberian state as the 'natural' endpoint of post-colonial political development. This idea of the state is indeed very powerful among elites and ordinary citizens alike. Nevertheless, when this belief is used to inform policy, this results in a misguided attempt to recreate the Western state in a different environment and without regard to its historical roots. While state-building in Europe was a process spanning centuries, today's developing and transforming countries face the challenge of consolidating statehood within a much shorter period (Ayoob 1995). This pressure can easily lead to an overstretch of political, administrative and military capacities that frequently result in acute crises and an erosion of legitimacy. It also has to be acknowledged that modern statehood is based on a set of ideas about authority, such as the public–private distinction, that used to be quite specific to a handful of Western societies. While these ideas have begun to spread throughout the world, the fact is that political institutions, and the social and cultural foundations that they are built on, do not travel well (Fukuyama 2004). Hence, modernization-style approaches that attempt to 'build states' should be altered in favour of more agnostic ones that leave open the question of how societies provide order and governance. Only recently have analysts

attempted to understand political order in 'failed states' not primarily in the sense of what is *not* there (the state), but of what actually *is* there (Clements et al. 2007).

Despite these theoretical shortcomings, state failure and state fragility are still useful concepts, because they direct attention to the role of political institutions. The next section shows how widespread this phenomenon is and looks at the causes of state failure.

Trends and correlates of state fragility

This section addresses two points. First it presents an overview of current datasets of state fragility. It then presents research into the causes of state failure.

Mapping state failure

Estimates on the number of fragile or failed states in the current international system vary widely. For instance, the *Economist* (2005) adopted a cautious approach, identifying just 20 'candidates for failure' based on World Bank data. The magazine highlighted the close correlation between state failure and conflict: fifteen of these 20 countries had experienced an armed conflict at some point since 1990. In contrast, the UK's Department for International Development produced a list of 46 countries that are home to 870 million people, i.e. 14 per cent of the world's population (DFID 2005, also Collier 2007).

A very recent and influential attempt to measure state failure and collapse is *The Failed States Index* (FSI), developed by the Fund for Peace, an independent research institute, together with the journal *Foreign Policy* (Fund for Peace 2005, 2008). The index is based on 12 social, economic, and political/military indicators relying on an analysis of events data gathered from media databases.[1] According to the FSI project, the problem of weak and failing states is far more serious than generally thought: the authors estimate that around two billion people live in insecure states, with varying degrees of vulnerability to widespread civil conflict.

This inconsistency in the classification of failed and fragile states has contributed to a dearth of knowledge about state failure. Since no one can agree on what a failed state is, very little is known about the similarities of these cases except for two things: (1) countries in sub-Saharan Africa are strongly over-represented in the sample, and (2) state failure and internal violence correlate closely. As to the first issue, state failure occurs in almost every region of the world. The 2008 ranking of the FSI includes such obvious candidates as Somalia, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Chad, but also countries such as Bangladesh (ranking 12th), Sri Lanka (20th) and Syria (35th). In spite of this geographical spread, sub-Saharan African countries dominate the list: among the ten countries most at risk, seven are located in Africa. Furthermore, most of the countries at the top of the ranking have experienced some form of large-scale internal violence in recent years. The University of Maryland's Peace and Conflict Project concludes: 'Seventy-seven percent of all international crises in the post-Cold War era (1990–2005) include one or more actors classified as unstable, fragile, or failed at the time of the crisis' (Hewitt et al. 2008: 17).

In addition to the characteristics of failed states, the lack of an agreed definition and solid data has also impeded the analysis of the causes of state failure. Nevertheless, there are findings that provide some insight into this question.

Correlates of and systemic perspectives on state failure

Due to the lack of a suitable dataset, there has been no large-N research into the causes of state failure. Thus, the current discussion frequently relies on results from what can be considered the next best thing: the work of the ill-named State Failure Task Force (SFTF). The SFTF was initiated in 1994 by then-US vice president Al Gore and is based at the University of Maryland. While the programme identified 136 events of state failure between 1955 and 1998, its concept of failure is far too broad: it defined state failure as 'serious political instability' including phenomena as diverse as genocides, disruptive regime changes, ethnic conflicts and revolutionary wars (State Failure Task Force Report 2003). Milliken and Krause rightly point out: 'This failure to distinguish conceptually the phenomena of state failure and collapse blurs the different processes that lead to functional failure or to institutional collapse, and obscures the relative rarity of full-blown state collapse' (Milliken and Krause 2002: 764f.).

However, due to the lack of better data, we may take the SFTF's results as a proxy for correlates of severe forms of state failure that are frequently accompanied by violence. In the Task Force's 'global model', regime type was the strongest predictor of imminent state failure. Strikingly, the authors found the odds of conflict and state failure to be seven times as high for partial democracies as they were for full democracies or autocracies. Other risk factors that roughly doubled the odds of state failure were low levels of material well-being, low trade openness and 'bad neighbourhood' effects such as the prevalence of armed conflicts in bordering countries.

Besides the global model, the SFTF also developed specific models, such as a regional model for sub-Saharan Africa. As with the global model, the strongest influence on the risk of state failure in Africa is regime type. Almost all the partial democracies failed within the first five years, and even in (apparently) full democracies, the probability of crisis was five times higher than it was for autocracies. This is particularly significant given that in sub-Saharan Africa, unlike other regions of the world, there has been a clear rise in the number of partial democracies over the past decade and a parallel decrease in the number of autocracies. Functioning democracies exist in some ten countries. In addition to the indicators identified in the global model, ethnic discrimination, unbalanced development (a high rate of urbanization with low per capita income) and leaders who are inexperienced or have remained too long in office are other risk factors in Africa. Finally, the adverse impact of 'bad neighbourhoods' is a powerful argument for including the international level in any analysis of the causes of conflict and state failure.

Collier (2007) has enumerated several possible causes for state failure that are, to a degree, self-reinforcing. Among his best-known concepts are the 'conflict trap' and the 'natural resource trap', but he also highlights the role of bad governance as well as geographical factors, such as access to the sea and the regional neighbourhood. He views these 'traps' as interlinked challenges and obstacles on the way to sustainable development.

Another argument is that internal conflicts contribute to state failure. This is in contrast to Tilly's well-known assertion about the European history of state formation, that 'war makes states' (Tilly 1985: 170). Since the mid-twentieth century, however, Tilly's claim does not seem to hold up any longer. In a radically changed international system, the internal wars waged in the global South from the 1950s to the 1990s have had the opposite effect, often contributing to state failure rather than to state-making. Herfried Münkler (2002: 18f.) considers these 'new wars', which he describes as depoliticized, brutal and complex, to be particularly destructive of state structures and as incomparable to Europe's 'state-making' wars of the late medieval and the modern period.

One key difference is that since 1945, the newly emerging states of the global South enjoyed a historically unprecedented level of protection (Jackson 1990). Thanks to the principles of self-determination and state sovereignty enshrined in international law, they were able to establish themselves as independent entities at the international level despite obvious deficits in their degree of state effectiveness. Once acquired, statehood was retained in perpetuity. During the Cold War, both sides were eager to shore up their respective clients via diplomatic, military and financial support. From this perspective, the brief surge in the number of civil wars and state failure events during the first half of the 1990s can be plausibly explained by the demise of the rivalry between the two super-powers. Without superpower support, repressive regimes in developing countries were abruptly confronted with massive demands for economic and political change and left without the resources to respond to these demands.

This discussion is important for this chapter in that some of the factors identified, such as the regional neighbourhood or internal conflicts, are intimately linked to security issues. As the next section shows, state failure per se is not as big a security threat as the various problems that arise out of it.

Security threats arising out of state fragility

State fragility causes different security threats at different levels. In the following, the global, regional and national levels will be addressed in turn.

The global level: failed states as the cause of transnational threats?

At the global level, the post-9/11 discourse links state failure to various kinds of immediate threats to international peace and stability. For instance, the 2002 National Security Strategy of the US posited that

> (t)he events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.
>
> (NSS 2002: Foreword)

In a similar manner, the European Security Strategy, adopted by the EU Heads of State in December 2003, identified state failure as one of five key threats to European security: 'Collapse of the State can be associated with obvious threats, such as organised crime or terrorism. State failure is an alarming phenomenon that undermines global governance and adds to regional instability' (Solana 2003: 4).

These statements betray an understanding of state fragility as a root cause or a facilitating condition for other, more immediate threats to Western/international security like terrorism, organized crime, refugee flows, migration and human trafficking. Even though all of these issues have by now entered the security discourse (see, e.g. Loescher and Milner 2004), terrorism is still the single most important issue, both at a discursive level as well as from the perspective of traditional concepts of national security.

At first glance, failed states seem to offer favourable conditions for the activities of transnational terrorist networks since the lack of state control opens up spaces where

shadowy groups can operate undisturbed. However, recent research demonstrates that there is no generalizable impact of state failure on terrorism, regardless of whether terrorist incidents (Newman 2007), the presence of terrorist bases, or recruitment patterns (Simons and Tucker 2007) were used as the dependent variable. There are several reasons why the expected relationship cannot be confirmed empirically. First, most activities of terrorist groups are not made easier by state failure. For instance, communications, logistics and planning are much easier to conduct in places with the necessary infrastructure. Second, maintaining bases in failed states changes the internal logic of terrorist groups, necessitating the exercise of territorial control. Third, operating in 'ungoverned areas' means that terrorists have to become involved in local politics in order to guarantee their own security and their ability to operate.

However, while no general correlation between state failure and terrorism can be upheld, some researchers are approaching the problem in different ways. Korteweg and Ehrhardt (2006) take a very promising approach by looking at sub-national 'sanctuaries' rather than host states as a whole. They find that these sanctuaries (1) are characterized by a low level of governmental control and (2) offer comparative advantages to terrorist groups. Contributing factors to the latter condition include the presence of sympathetic ethnic/religious groups, a legacy of civil conflict, difficult geography, economic opportunities for the terrorist actors, economic grievances of the population and regional stimuli. Piazza (2007) takes a different approach by focusing his investigation on 19 Middle Eastern states between 1972 and 2003. While he retains a national-level perspective, his regression analysis shows that episodes of political instability contributed to terrorist activities in this area.

These studies move research into new directions and offer new insights into the relationship between statehood and terrorism, even though their results still have to be subjected to further empirical research. In addition to including sub-national and regional factors, a clearer focus on *transnational* terrorist actors would also be a useful modification to the research framework since these, with al-Qaida in particular, are of greatest interest to Western states.

Regional-level issues: escalation of conflict and refugees

The impact of failing states on the region can be generally divided into military, social and economic factors (Lambach 2007). In the military dimension, conflict can escalate by drawing in actors from neighbouring countries as well as by rebels seeking out sanctuary and constructing bases across the border, with or without the agreement of that country's government. Rarely can violent conflict that arises out of a state's failure be truly contained within its country of origin. On a social level, people, especially those living near the border, intensify their cross-border contacts when the state is weakening. When the state fails, refugees follow these links of solidarity to neighbouring countries. Refugee populations represent a tremendous social and economic burden for their host state, and in some cases, a security risk as well, by engaging in political or militant activity and by contributing to small arms proliferation. Finally, in the economic dimension, failing states often become hubs of a transnational shadow economy where drugs, guns and other illicit goods are traded. They also negatively affect neighbouring countries' growth rates by scaring away investors, disrupting trade routes and forcing neighbours to increase their military expenditures (Chauvet and Collier 2004).

While state failure is an internally driven process, it is embedded in its regional context. Where several neighbouring states are failing, their fates can become interlinked in a

way that is comparable to what Rubin (2002) has called 'regional conflict formations'. Thus, the regional clustering of failing states, as seen in parts of West Africa during the 1990s, is neither the result of pure chance, nor is it specific to these particular countries. Instead, it is a systemic property emerging from the transnational interactions among processes of state failure.

Local/national-level issues: the human and economic costs of state failure

There are no specific estimates on the economic costs of state failure. However, using the quite similar World Bank concept of Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS), Collier and Hoeffler (2004) develop a model to gauge the social and economic costs incurred by a LICUS experiencing violent conflict. Their estimates are based on loss of economic growth, civilian opportunity costs of military expenditure and the impact of war on public health. For an average LICUS, the overall costs of armed conflict amount to US$29bn. Including the damage to neighbouring countries, the average overall cost of a single civil war adds up to US$64bn. Based on a comparable statistical model, Chauvet and Collier (2004: 3f.) found 'that LICUS status typically reduces the annual growth rate of peacetime economies by 2.3 percentage points relative to other developing economies'. This substantially diminishes the chance of beginning a sustainable turnaround, so that 'the typical LICUS is likely to stay in that state for decades'. Over the long-term, this amounts to a total loss of 4.6 times the initial GDP. This clearly shows that state fragility, armed conflict and poverty interact in complex and mutually reinforcing ways.

The negative impact of fragile statehood on development is unequivocal. But it is more than an economic burden on national economies. At a local level, vulnerable groups within fragile states will suffer from a decline of human security, defined here as the protection of 'people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations' (Commission on Human Security 2003: 4). Taking the core indicators of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a guideline, research has consistently shown that human insecurity is widespread within fragile states (Chauvet and Collier 2004). According to the DFID, child mortality is twice as high and maternal mortality actually is three times greater in fragile states than in other Low Income Countries with better institutional performance. Around one-third of the population is malnourished, and a higher proportion of the population suffers from malaria (DFID 2005: 9). De facto, the MDGs are unachievable for these countries.

Conclusion: state-building – the new panacea?

This chapter has sought to outline the various ways in which failed states can be considered a security threat. To this end, we first presented our understanding of state failure and presented some of the correlates and causes of this phenomenon. We then discussed the implications of state failure for various referents of security at the global, the regional and the national/local level. It should have become clear that failed states represent a different security threat for more remote countries than they do for neighbouring countries or for their own populations. Nevertheless, it is also obvious they are a security threat to all of these diverse referents. Hence, there should be a joint interest in developed and developing countries alike to prevent state failure or to alleviate its repercussions.

The main strategy that has been proposed as both a reactive and a preventive instrument is 'state-building' (Fukuyama 2004), which combines elements of security and development policy. This is underscored by the recent policy focus on the security–development nexus and a commitment by the international donor community to 'stay engaged, but differently' under conditions of state failure (Debiel and Ottaway 2007). For a long time, 'state-building' was understood as a historical process of state formation, exemplified by the development of the state as a distinctive mode of political organization in European history. In the 1950s and 1960s, modernization theory posited that post-colonial countries would undergo a similar process of state- and nation-building. However, the post-colonial state turned out to be plagued by weak institutions, and several newly independent countries succumbed to internal turmoil. In many others, democratic systems were supplanted by authoritarian ones.

Political actors have revitalized the state-building approach in recent years in light of experiences with state failure and internal war in Somalia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan and many other cases. However, the similarities between the old and the new approaches are limited. A major difference lies in the role that the strategies attribute to external actors. Whereas earlier concepts assumed that state-building was a 'natural' process that would simply run its course once the colonizing powers had withdrawn, 'state-building' as it is now understood virtually demands external intervention, although theorists differ as to whether outside actors can 'build states', or whether they can only support endogenous processes of state-building.

The particular appeal of the state-building framework is the possibility of integrating development measures with security and crisis prevention concerns (UK Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005). Development, security and crisis prevention experts agree that strengthening state institutions is an important goal when dealing with an unstable country. However, this potential has yet to be realized in practice. In post-conflict countries (where the international community is usually the most active), state-building too often still takes a back seat to holding elections, introducing free markets and providing social services. In countries like Afghanistan, 'fighting terrorists' is accorded a higher priority than putting the state on a stable footing.

Present efforts at post-conflict state-building are also hampered by overly ambitious reform agendas. Even in the best of circumstances, outside actors simply cannot transform a society to the degree that the architects of these missions envision. Marina Ottaway rightly points out the problems with such an activist approach: 'The model chosen by the international community is a short-cut to the Weberian state, an attempt to develop such an entity quickly and without the long, conflictual and often brutal evolution that historically underlies the formation of states' (Ottaway 2002: 1004). It is quite obvious that current state-building strategies have not yet shed the optimistic belief in social engineering they inherited from modernization theory.

These strategies also overlook the deeply political nature of the reforms they advocate. Political institutions cannot be easily transplanted from one country to another. Therefore, state-building has to consider how these institutions are embedded in society. Similar to Putzel's (1999) argument that lack of congruence between democratic, formal and informal institutions is an impediment to democratization, we argue that the institutions that make up the formal state have to be aligned with societal institutions if they are to be sustainable and effective.

Therefore, we would advocate an approach that takes the local context into account to a much greater degree, which we refer to as 'embedded state-building' (Debiel and Lambach

2008). This approach still focuses on increasing the institutional capacity of the state, yet it also emphasizes that reforms have to be aligned with local structures and resonate with local interests. Embedded state-building is informed by the view that sustainable state-building can only take place where there is congruence between formal and informal institutions and between external and domestic interests. In the end, this necessitates a more humble approach by outside actors: they cannot 'build' states in a purposive manner, but should instead try to find indigenous processes of state formation that they can support. A state that is developed in this way is more embedded in society, and thus much more sustainable.

Note

1 Most recently, the Brookings Institution has published an *Index of Weak States in the Developing World*, which works with a set of 20 indicators that are used as proxies for core aspects of state functions in four dimensions: economic, political, security and social welfare. For more detailed information, see Rice and Patrick (2008).

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