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International Strategies in Fragile States: Expanding the Toolbox?

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Summary

In recent years, international actors have taken significant strides in attempting to develop strategies and instruments that effectively address the problem of weak and failing states. On the one hand, the intensified focus on state failure has to do with general, fundamental shifts in the international security environment since the end of the Cold War. On the other hand, however, the sharpened concern with fragile states arises from the specific challenges, experiences, and interests of key international actors – particularly the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union.

This paper provides a brief overview of current efforts to improve and expand the “toolbox” of state-building instruments and strategies. These include (a) the refinement of existing instruments through greater policy coherence in the fields of conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, and development assistance, as well as (b) theoretical elaborations and practical advances regarding a set of more innovative, targeted, and sometimes controversial strategies, including “shared” or “conditional” sovereignty, “security first” approaches, the potential recognition of new states, and regional solutions.

While constructive steps have been taken to improve strategies and policies directed toward fragile states, it is not clear how long the international community and its publics will be willing to bear the material and human costs of long-term, comprehensive post-conflict reconstruction projects and “big pushes” in foreign aid. As a result, more targeted instruments deserve closer consideration from policy-makers seeking to make good policy decisions with scarce resources. Regardless of whether the selected instruments are comprehensive or targeted in nature, the way forward must be characterized by enhanced coordination and coherence among national, regional, and international actors.

1. Introduction

In recent years, international actors have taken significant strides in attempting to develop strategies and instruments that effectively address the problem of weak and failing states. The policy dynamism behind the issue of state failure is reflected in the prominent position given this topic in such key security documents as the U.S. National Security Strategy, the European Security Strategy, and numerous U.N. reports including the Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change as well as Kofi Annan's own *In Larger Freedom: Towards Security, Development and Human Rights for All*.¹

State failure as key international security risk

On the one hand, the intensified focus on state failure has to do with general, fundamental shifts in the international security environment since the end of the Cold War, including (a) the predominance of intra-state conflicts over inter-state wars, (b) increased demand for international involvement in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction operations, and (c) the multiple humanitarian and security risks that emanate from failing states. The attacks of September 11, 2001 represent the critical turning point that linked the problem of state failure with issues of international security, as a failed state – Afghanistan – provided safe harbor for the preparation of catastrophic terrorist acts. Fragile states are now viewed as a breeding ground for the main international threats of the 21st century, including terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, migration and population displacement, pandemic diseases, and organized crime.

Fundamental shifts in the global security environment

On the other hand, however, the sharpened concern with fragile states arises from the specific challenges, experiences, and interests of key international actors in recent years:

- For the *United Nations*, foreign policy debacles surrounding the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sudan, and Iraq have forced a reassessment of U.N. security policy and stimulated reform efforts in the areas of humanitarian intervention, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction.
- For the *United States*, policy failures in Afghanistan and especially Iraq have led to a fundamental reappraisal of how to plan and conduct nation-building and post-conflict stabilization operations.
- For the *European Union*, the ineffectual initial response to violent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, together with the EU's self-declared ambition to develop an effective Common Foreign and Security Policy and European Security and Defense Policy, have driven efforts to strengthen both civilian and military peacekeeping and peacebuilding capacities.

Challenges facing specific actors

All of the above factors have underscored the urgency of improving international policies that seek to address the problem of fragile states. This paper provides a brief overview of current efforts to improve and expand the "toolbox" of state-building instruments and strategies. These include both (a) the refinement of existing, "standard" instruments as well as (b) theoretical elaborations and practical advances regarding a set of more innovative, differentiated, and sometimes controversial strategies.

2. Coordination and Coherence: Refining Standard State-building Instruments

Existing policy tools The existing repertoire of state-building instruments and strategies employed by international actors includes diplomacy and dialogue, development and trade policy, and conflict-related operations (covering the spectrum of conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction). As individual countries, regional organizations, and international institutions have gained experience in the multi-faceted tasks of state-building and attempted to institutionalize lessons learned, the most significant progress has occurred within two of these areas: conflict-related operations and development assistance.

2.1. Conflict Prevention and Post-conflict Reconstruction

Conflict-related policies This broad policy field encompasses the entire range of instruments and strategies to promote peace and security, effective governance, and socioeconomic development in states where there is a high potential for violent conflict, or that are recovering from conflict situations.² While international responses to conflict seek to address both pre- and post-conflict situations, up to now the international community has clearly directed the bulk of its resources toward post-conflict reconstruction (which is increasingly referred to within UN circles as “post-conflict peacebuilding” and within the US policymaking establishment as “stabilization and reconstruction”).

Institutionalizing lessons learned? The end of the Cold War signified a fundamental shift in the orchestration of international security. Violent conflicts erupted in numerous weak new states in the post-socialist European landscape, and numerous Third World proxy regimes imploded as superpower sponsors cut off their artificial life support. As a result, intrastate and regional conflagrations supplanted interstate wars as the primary forms of international conflict. At the same time, international institutions – particularly the United Nations – were no longer polarized and paralyzed by the power struggles that had created nearly insuperable obstacles to multilateral action during the Cold War. Demand for multilateral intervention in conflict-affected states and regions increased significantly, and international actors – both military and civilian, state and non-state – found themselves engaged in peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations, and post-conflict reconstruction activities in nearly every part of the world, including Africa, Southeastern Europe, Central America, and Southeast Asia.

The results of the international community’s increasing engagement in peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and state-building efforts have been mixed at best. Some interventions have been partial successes (e.g., East Timor, Sierra Leone, former Yugoslavia), some have been downright failures (Somalia), and in some critical cases (notably Rwanda and Sudan), multilateral institutions have become involved too late or not at all. Furthermore, although international military and civilian actors have been on a fast and steep learning curve, important lessons learned have either not been adequately institutionalized or have been disregarded entirely as largely ad hoc operations continually reinvent the post-conflict reconstruction wheel (this has been most evident in U.S.-led engagements in Afghanistan and especially Iraq). The accumulated costs of these partial successes, undetermined outcomes, outright failures, and unincorporated lessons learned

have become too high – in terms of financial outlays, unnecessary lives lost, fading political will, and international legitimacy.

In the past few years, however, key international actors have undertaken a remarkable number of institutional innovations in an attempt to address the problem of state failure with greater coherence. These innovations focus primarily on improving civilian-military and interdepartmental coordination in the planning and implementation of conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction operations. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the most prominent examples.

Promoting coherence in conflict-related operations

In the United Nations:

- One of the few concrete accomplishments of the United Nations World Summit in September 2005 was the decision to create a Peacebuilding Commission. Guided by “the need for a coordinated, coherent and integrated approach to post-conflict peacebuilding,”³ the Commission will be an intergovernmental advisory body whose goal will be to bring together relevant actors (local, national, and international) and resources in order to implement better integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery processes in countries emerging from violent conflict. Other objectives include serving as a central point for the identification and institutionalization of best practices and ensuring sustained international attention to countries undergoing transitions from post-conflict recovery to long-term economic and political development. The Peacebuilding Commission was approved by the Security Council and the General Assembly in December 2005 and will be funded through a multi-year, voluntary Peacebuilding Fund.

Approaches of various international actors

In European Union institutions:

While still saddled with internal structural problems that at times hinder effective policy planning and implementation, the EU has played a clear leadership role in establishing institutions that enable a more coherent response to international security risks, including the security problems associated with state weakness and failure.⁴ These institutions are embedded within the framework of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP).

- Within the Commission, the Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management Unit was established in 2001 as part of DG External Relations with the purpose of coordinating the Commission’s conflict prevention activities, integrating conflict prevention into the programming of EU foreign aid, overseeing a Rapid Reaction Mechanism that provides quick and flexible funding in urgent pre- and post-conflict situations, and maintaining contact with key international actors such as the United Nations, the OECD, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and international financial institutions.
- Within the Council, a number of bodies and committees serve important functions in (a) coordinating civilian conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, (b) strengthening civil-military cooperation, and (c) providing forums for consultation and coordination among EU member states. Some of these bodies include: the Political and Security Committee, the Policy Planning

and Early Warning Unit, the Joint Situation Centre (SITCEN), the Directorate-General for Civilian Crisis Management and Coordination, the Civil-Military Cell within the EU Military Staff, and the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM). Moreover, the objectives elaborated in the 2010 Headline Goal and 2008 Civilian Headline Goal (both within the framework of ESDP) are guided by the priorities of developing modular, multifunctional crisis response capabilities, reinforcing civil-military cooperation, and enhancing interoperability among the civilian and defense capabilities of member states.

The European Union and its
Member States

- Finally, although its future is in serious jeopardy, the Constitutional Treaty contains important innovations that would foster coherence within EU foreign and security policy. These include the establishment of a European Foreign Minister and a European diplomatic corps as well as the introduction of “permanent structured cooperation,” a means by which smaller groups of member states can choose to push forward with integration in the field of defense policy. Even if the Constitution is ultimately never ratified, most of the key innovations it contains in the fields of CFSP and ESDP can be implemented through treaty amendments and interinstitutional agreements.⁵

In the United Kingdom:

- The U.K. has pioneered an interministerial pooling approach – also known as “joined-up government” – in the field of conflict management. The central achievement of this approach has been the establishment of the Global Conflict Prevention Pool⁶ and the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool⁷ in 2001. These Conflict Prevention Pools integrate the expertise of the Department for International Development (DFID), the Ministry of Defense (MoD), and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and provide pooled funding for joint initiatives to promote security, development, and good governance in states threatened or affected by violent conflict.
- Based upon the model established by the joined-up approach, a Post-conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) was established in September 2004 and should be fully operational, with an interdepartmental staff of approximately 40, by mid-2006.⁸ The PCRU is tasked with (a) improving civilian-military links in planning and implementing post-conflict reconstruction policies and (b) strengthening coordination between the U.K. and other international actors. The PCRU incorporates experts from DFID, MoD and FCO, and will also involve the creation of a ministerial sub-committee chaired by the Foreign Secretary.

In Germany:

- In May 2004, the German federal government passed the Action Plan on “Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution, and Post-conflict Peacebuilding,” which defines conflict-related foreign policy activities as cross-departmental tasks.⁹ An interministerial steering group, comprised of representatives from all federal ministries and under the supervision of the Foreign Office, was established in September 2004. The German government has also sought to institutionalize the participation of civil society actors in governmental decision-making processes by creating a civilian advisory board to the interministerial steering group.

In the Netherlands:

- In 2004, the Dutch government introduced a Stability Fund that combines resources from the development and foreign policy budgets to provide support for specific conflict-related issues such as security sector reform, developing peacekeeping capacities, and small arms control.¹⁰

In the United States:

- The Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization was established within the Department of State in August 2004 to oversee interagency coordination of civilian conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction capacities.¹¹ A staff of approximately 35 persons includes representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, USAID, the CIA, and the military's Joint Staff.
- In November 2005, the Department of Defense defined stability operations as a “core U.S. military mission” that will be given priority comparable to combat operations and integrated across all Pentagon activities.¹² In addition, the U.S. Army has converted some of its artillery and air defense units into military police and civil affairs units.
- Numerous bipartisan task forces and experts have argued that the U.S. government must raise the profile of conflict prevention and post-conflict stabilization within U.S. foreign and security policy by (a) appointing cabinet-, director-, or deputy secretary-level officials specifically tasked with civilian-military and interagency coordination in these areas, (b) substantially increasing budgetary resources allocated to these tasks, and (c) improving cooperation with other national governments, regional organizations, and international institutions.¹³

Developments in the U.S.

These are all auspicious developments that hold the potential for more integrated and effective policymaking in the future. But they remain little more than promising first steps, as issues of financing, staffing, authority, and actual implementation remain problematic in nearly all of these cases. For example, the U.S. Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization was recently dealt a severe setback when the U.S. Congress refused funding for a planned \$100 million Conflict Response Fund proposed by the Bush administration.¹⁴ In addition, the ORS remains underfunded and understaffed, and ORS director Carlos Pascual recently left his post for a position at a leading U.S. think tank.¹⁵ The German Action Plan remains largely that – a plan with good intentions but very little supplemental funding and no dedicated support staff.¹⁶ Coherence in EU policymaking is impeded by the EU's pillar structure, in which the Council (i.e., the member states) retains nearly exclusive authority over European security and defense policy (including short-term peacekeeping and stabilization operations), while European development and trade policy – i.e., policy fields that promote state- and institution-building over the mid- to long-term – are largely the domain of the European Commission.¹⁷ In addition, EU offices such as the Conflict Prevention Unit are notoriously short-staffed.¹⁸ Finally, the clashing interests of various UN member states and departments may yet render the Peacebuilding Commission an ineffectual talk shop.¹⁹

Promising but limited first steps

2.2. Development Assistance

Heightened focus on development assistance

In 2005, the issue of development assistance surged to the top of the international agenda. High-level commissions (the UN Millennium Project, the U.K. government's Commission on Africa), widely publicized international events and meetings (the G-8 Gleneagles summit, the United Nations World Summit, worldwide "Live 8" concerts), high-profile manifestos (Jeffrey Sachs' *The End of Poverty*), and the breakthrough decision by G-8 leaders to cancel the debt of 18 of the world's poorest countries focused the international spotlight on the multidimensional problems of poor countries, which also form the bulk of the world's weak and failing states. These forums have overwhelmingly served as platforms for asserting that a massive increase in foreign aid is necessary to eliminate poverty, increase human security, and place the world's poorest populations on a path toward sustainable development.

"Big push:" pros and cons

However, proponents of the "big push" have not been without their prominent detractors. Numerous experts have argued that foreign aid causes more problems than it solves: by overwhelming weak state institutions that are unable to absorb assistance from a plethora of international donors; by providing financial assistance to corrupt regimes that exploit foreign money for personal enrichment rather than the pursuit of development-oriented policies; by distorting markets and exchange rates and thereby undermining the competitiveness of local industries; and by establishing an incentive structure that is not necessarily conducive to good governance and the implementation of political and economic reforms. These critics also argue that donors themselves are a key part of the problem, because they often pursue donor-driven agendas that fail to take the interests, needs, and capacities of recipient countries into sufficient account, and because they fail to coordinate their programs and priorities adequately with other donors.²⁰

Promoting coherence in development assistance

Despite disagreements over the desirability of a "big push" in foreign aid to impoverished countries, both sides of the debate generally concur that (a) development policy must focus more squarely on the problem of state weakness and failure and (b) development assistance must be characterized by greater coherence and coordination, at both the national and international levels, in order to improve the effectiveness of aid. As in the fields of conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction, the drive toward greater coherence within development policy is reflected in important institutional innovations:

- In 2002, the World Bank established a task force on "Low Income Countries Under Stress" (LICUS). The LICUS Initiative adheres to the principle that "state-building is the central objective in fragile states, and that effective donor programs require integrated approaches across the political-security-development nexus."²¹ As foreign aid becomes increasingly conditional upon recipient countries' implementation of economic and governance reforms, international donors are likely to withdraw from precisely those states that need assistance the most. In order to prevent particularly fragile states from becoming "aid orphans," a LICUS Trust Fund targets a limited number of key policy areas including the strengthening of institutions; initiating basic economic, social and governance reforms; building capacity for social service delivery; and supporting domestic reformers. By cooperating with other international actors such as the OECD, the UN, the EU, and bilateral donors, the initiative seeks to

promote donor harmonization and the development of joint assessments and strategies while gearing donor policies and procedures to the constraints of low capacity in fragile states.

- In a similar vein, the Fragile States Group within the OECD’s Development Cooperation Directorate (DAC) focuses on donor coordination, the improvement of aid effectiveness, and service delivery in states referred to as “difficult partnerships,” particularly those states emerging from violent conflict. Of particular relevance here is the Group’s emphasis on policy coherence and whole-of-government approaches, i.e., coordination among agencies and ministries active in the policy fields of development, security, and governance. The OECD has produced a set of draft Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States, which emphasize the necessity of joined-up action among political, economic, security, and development actors at the local, national, regional, and international level.²²
- In November 2005, the European Union published a Joint Statement entitled “The European Consensus on Development,” which underscores the EU’s commitment to improving development policy coordination (a) within European institutions, (b) between the EU and its member states, and (c) between the EU and other international donors. The EU’s proposals for enhancing international donor coordination and policy coherence include the establishment of shared analysis frameworks, joint multi-annual programming, and the increased use of multi-donor planning and implementation processes. Moreover, the statement emphasizes the need for development policy to focus on the problem of state fragility and conflict prevention, by providing support for governance reforms, rule of law mechanisms, anti-corruption measures, and the establishment of viable state institutions.²³ In addition, individual EU member states – particularly the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden – have been at the forefront of efforts to enhance development policy coherence and to link the issues of state-building and development.²⁴
- As part of its “transformational diplomacy” initiative launched in January 2006, the United States announced a restructuring of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with the objective of strengthening coordination and alignment between U.S. foreign and development policy. Innovations include the creation of a new Director of Foreign Assistance within the State Department, who will double-hat as the lead administrator of USAID. This shift aims to consolidate authority over the budgeting, planning, and implementation of all State and USAID foreign aid programs – which were previously scattered throughout both departments, sometimes to redundant or contradictory effect – within one office. The stated objective of these changes is to promote “integration between development, diplomacy, democracy, and security.”²⁵

Different approaches

Clearly, the institutional and policy shifts discussed above do not indicate that all of these international actors are pursuing identical strategic agendas. In addition, the perceived desirability and efficacy of these changes have been the subject of heated debate amongst state and non-state actors. What is important to note here, however, is that these refinements to standard state-building instruments represent the growing realization within the international community that the lessons

Addressing the security-development nexus

learned from past efforts must be more effectively institutionalized and that coordination within and among national, regional, and international actors must be improved, particularly with regard to analysis, decision-making, funding mechanisms, and the planning and implementation of programs and strategies. In light of experiences gathered in responding to fragile states during the past 15 years, international security actors have recognized that effective state-building requires much more than short-term military-led stabilization operations. In turn, development actors have recognized that security and effective governance are essential prerequisites for sustainable development. As a result, international actors are placing increasing emphasis on *policy coherence* – in particular, policies that address the nexus between security, development, and diplomacy – as an essential component in the improvement of international responses to weak and failing states.

3. Beyond the Standard Toolbox

High costs of
comprehensive approaches

Despite this progress, numerous policymakers and experts continue to express strong doubts as to whether comprehensive conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, and development assistance strategies can achieve the goals of stabilizing fragile states and setting them on the path to long-term sustainable development. Even relatively “successful” state-building efforts in states and territories such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo remain plagued with political, economic, social, and security problems, and critical analysts of development policy pointedly ask why a “big push” should succeed now, when hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign aid spent over the past five decades have been so spectacularly unable to promote economic growth in developing countries, particularly in Africa.²⁶ Stephen Krasner argues, for example, that “the policy tools that powerful and well-governed states have available to ‘fix’ badly governed or collapsed states – principally governance assistance and transitional administration ... – are inadequate. In the future, better domestic governance in badly governed, failed, and occupied polities will require the transcendence of accepted rules...”²⁷ In addition, Marina Ottaway and Stefan Mair assert that the international community simply does not possess the material, financial, and human resources, not to mention the political will, to mount a large number of simultaneous, comprehensive state-building efforts that encompass the (re)construction of political, economic, and security structures (e.g., such as those being carried out in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq).²⁸ Such comprehensive operations are likely to be feasible, if at all, only in small states. As a result, certain scholars and policymakers have begun to suggest a number of less conventional, more limited, and sometimes controversial instruments and strategies to address the problem of fragile statehood. The following sections provide a brief overview of the most prominent of these approaches.

Need for more
targeted tools?

3.1. “Shared” or “Conditional” Sovereignty

Alternative governance
arrangements

The concept of “shared” or “conditional” sovereignty involves the establishment of alternative forms of governance in states that are unable or unwilling to fulfill their responsibilities as states yet still maintain international sovereignty. This concept has been most fully elaborated by Stephen Krasner, whose recent move from academia to direct the U.S. State Department’s Policy Planning Staff may indicate that this idea is shifting more steadily from theory to practice.²⁹

The notion of shared or conditional sovereignty entails international involvement in limited, targeted areas of policymaking within particular fragile states. Stated briefly, this involves the creation of new institutional forms in which international actors share authority with domestic officials over key policy areas within a target state, with the objective of enabling these states to fulfill certain core functions. Examples could include:

- *Natural resources revenue management*, whereby representatives from the international community monitor revenues from resources such as oil, natural gas, diamonds, and timber to prevent corruption and to ensure the transparent expenditure of these revenues in a manner that promotes development and benefits society at large, e.g., through institutional development, infrastructure projects, and the provision of public services such as health care and education.
- *The maintenance of security*, e.g., through the presence of monitors and trainers who assist in capacity-building and the implementation of security sector reform, police training, and combating organized crime.
- *Oversight of judicial systems*, e.g., by establishing courts that include a mixture of local and international judges, in order to strengthen the rule of law and judicial independence.

Ideally, these arrangements would entail long-term monitoring and support, as well as sufficient enforcement authority, with no pressure for a short-term exit strategy. The indefinite time frame of such operations might thereby counteract the problem of short-term interventions in which political and economic spoilers simply wait for the international community to leave the scene. In addition, the targeted nature of these actions would require far less international commitment in terms of funding and personnel, thereby easing the burden of generating political will.

Long-term engagement
needed

Forms of shared sovereignty already are, or in some cases will likely soon be, in practice. The clearest example will likely be in Kosovo, where the most likely outcome of status talks is a form of “conditional independence” in which Kosovo gains *de jure* sovereignty while international forces maintain security and international observers monitor the protection of minority rights.³⁰ An additional (albeit problematic) example of shared sovereignty is the Chad oil pipeline project. In 1998, the World Bank conditioned its financial support for the construction of this pipeline on the establishment of a revenue management program to ensure that the notoriously corrupt Chad government uses its oil income to promote poverty reduction. Supported by an international advisory board, the revenue management framework requires that the majority of oil revenues be spent on “priority sectors” such as health, education, and infrastructure, and that 10% of proceeds from oil sales be set aside in a fund for future generations.³¹ Finally, a recent International Crisis Group analysis of state-building in post-conflict Liberia strongly argued that the international community should assume responsibility for the management of revenue from ports, airports, customs, and the export of timber and diamonds, in order to promote transparency in revenue collection and to ensure that the government transfers funds to ministries and local governments. According to ICG, international management of revenue collection in Liberia would (a) provide the state with the financial resources necessary to pursue a development agenda, (b) make politics less attractive for warlords (because political power would not mean easy

Practical examples

access to money), (c) stimulate better governance through greater transparency, and (d) allow a long-term international presence to pay for itself, since the increased revenue accruing to state coffers would allow the Liberian government to assume the expenses for the international mission.³²

Ensuring legitimacy

Shared or conditional sovereignty represents a promising potential tool for addressing core state-building issues with a relatively limited commitment of financial resources and personnel. Nevertheless, the concept is not without its problems. For example, shared sovereignty regimes imposed forcibly from outside by the international community would almost certainly suffer from a lack of legitimacy in the host country. Ideally, therefore, such operations would be established upon the invitation of a particular fragile state. Yet how realistic is it to expect weak – and often corrupt – regimes to consent to a long-term, partial surrender of state sovereignty? One possible solution would be to make international assistance to a particular state conditional upon the establishment of a shared sovereignty arrangement. In addition, major democracies could pass legislation requiring that natural resources imported from particularly corrupt or fragile states be subject to an internationally monitored revenue management framework. Moreover, since the problem of state fragility is generally a regional phenomenon, shared sovereignty regimes could gain legitimacy through the power of positive example. In other words, if a shared sovereignty regime in one state in a troubled region proved successful in promoting security, good governance, and/or economic development, populations in neighboring states could mobilize public pressure to induce their governments to introduce similar arrangements.³³

Finally, due to their limited and targeted nature, shared sovereignty regimes are most likely an inadequate instrument for addressing the multifaceted problems of states that have imploded due to violent conflict or institutional collapse. Rather, such arrangements are more appropriate for weak states possessing sufficient stability, institutional capacity, and political will, or post-conflict states that have made reasonable progress toward recovery.³⁴

3.2. “Security First”

Security as foremost collective good?

Another targeted approach toward the problem of fragile states picks up from the point that a large number of states possess the potential for failure, and each of these states is embedded within its own complex national and regional dynamic. Consequently, it is infeasible for the international community to deploy comprehensive state-building projects that encompass the dimensions of security, governance, and socioeconomic development in all of these states; international actors simply do not possess the financial means, human resources, political will, and knowledge to accomplish such a monumental task. Some analysts have therefore asked whether there is a “hierarchy of collective goods” that should be prioritized when addressing fragile states, namely the fundamental prerequisites of security and basic structures of the rule of law.³⁵

Different types of security challenges

The “security first” approach argues that, first and foremost, security and stability must be established as the essential foundation for long-term development in fragile states. Marina Ottaway and Stefan Mair assert that the most important aspect of state failure is the breakdown of internal security and the inability of states to exercise effective control over their territory and to exert a monopoly on the use of

force. Therefore, international interventions should focus more narrowly on restoring the state's capacity to perform these core tasks.³⁶

Focusing on security as the primary task of state-building means that international actors would need to analyze and respond appropriately to the different types of security challenges that confront fragile states. For example, if a particular state is faced with military challenges involving armed insurgents, secessionist movements, and/or cross-border attacks, the appropriate policy response would likely involve external intervention in the form of peace enforcement and peacekeeping.³⁷ In most instances, however, fragile states struggle with security challenges that involve not military challenges but rather the breakdown of law and order, organized crime, corruption, and a lack of police force capacity. The accompanying vacuum of power is then filled by private security actors, violent gangs, youth militias, etc. In these cases, the necessary policy response involves security sector reform, i.e., the restructuring and retraining of armed forces, police, and intelligence services, and the strengthening of civilian oversight capacities.³⁸

In fact, a modified form of the "security first" approach appears to be gaining traction in policy circles. The joined-up government strategies in the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands, mentioned above, each place particular emphasis on security sector reform in fragile states as a key prerequisite for state-building and long-term development. Yet despite the common-sense, targeted approach of "security first," the concept leaves a critical question unanswered: Is the establishment of basic security and stability sufficient to set a virtuous cycle of development in motion, or will security itself remain precarious without visible progress toward political and economic development?

Virtuous or vicious cycle?

3.3. Recognizing New States

The question of recognizing new sovereign states is one of the most controversial subjects in the debate over potential solutions to the problem of state failure and collapse. The issue is raised most frequently in connection with Africa, due to (a) the largely arbitrary nature of borders inherited from the colonial period and (b) the existence of many states that are either too small to be economically viable or too large and ethnically diverse to be managed effectively by weak and/or corrupt governments. Discussions on the potential creation of new states – particularly by granting sovereignty to substate entities – thus almost universally refer to Somaliland, which has developed increasingly autonomous and effective governing structures since the collapse of Somalia, or to other African countries such as Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. But this question affects other regions as well, particularly the South Caucasus (where the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia seek either independence or fusion with other states) and the Western Balkans (Kosovo and Montenegro).

New sovereign entities?

Those who oppose the recognition of new states generally rely on five different arguments.³⁹ First, such an act might create a precedent that could ignite an uncontrollable process of claims to independence and self-determination on behalf of countless ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups in almost every world region. This process would almost certainly be accompanied by instability, violent conflict, and mass movements of people that could easily have regional or global spillover effects. Second, the construction of new nation-states and administrative

Arguments against

apparatuses would likely be an extraordinarily costly effort in terms of financial resources, personnel, and international assistance. Third, there are other institutional solutions that stop short of creating new sovereign states, such as power-sharing arrangements, decentralization, and federalism. Fourth, some analysts argue – particularly with regard to Africa – that state-building processes in many fragile states have been telescoped into a number of years or decades, whereas it took European states centuries to solidify into their current form. Rather than having their existence called into question, such fragile new states should be given more time – and international economic and governance assistance – to consolidate their statehood.⁴⁰ Fifth, there is no assurance that the leaders of new state formations will be more inclined to pursue a development agenda and protect minority rights, or that they will be any less self-interested and corrupt than the previous central government. In fact, self-appointed leaders of independence movements may very well fabricate and manipulate “national” identities as a way to reap the benefits of the acquisition of statehood.

Arguments for

In contrast, analysts who support a more open debate on this controversial issue mobilize a number of arguments favoring the possible recognition of new states.⁴¹ First, some substate entities possess greater legitimacy and institutional capacity, and are far better at providing collective goods, than their respective central governments. For example, Somaliland enjoys higher levels of investment, trade, and human development than other regions in Somalia and has already adopted key trappings of statehood including a constitution, government structures, elections, security forces, and its own currency.⁴² Second, without formal independence, relatively efficient and stable substate entities are unable to benefit from the legitimacy that statehood brings, particularly with regard to representation in international organizations, access to development assistance, and the ability to establish legitimate security structures. As a result, their populations do not enjoy the security, political, and socioeconomic benefits that would likely accrue from formal statehood. Third, fears of a limitless chain reaction of demands for self-determination and independence may be overstated. For example, the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1993 did not lead to the further fragmentation of the Ethiopian state, even though southern Ethiopia contains more than 40 nationalities and the country’s administrative units are organized to some extent according to ethnic identity. Fourth, the potential instability and violence that might be caused by the creation of new states must be weighed against the harm – in terms of human rights abuses, poverty, disease, and death – that current state arrangements inflict upon their populations on a daily basis. Finally, the realities on the ground in numerous failing and failed states often require international actors to circumvent incapacitated central government institutions and cooperate with local and substate authorities in order to accomplish their peacebuilding and development objectives. As a result, the international community already works closely with substate entities in these states as a matter of operational necessity.

Possible conditions for recognizing new states

One possible solution to this discursive and political stalemate might be to apply strict conditions, agreed upon under appropriate regulations in international law, to the international recognition of any new states. Such conditions could include the following:

- Changes in national borders must be agreed upon consensually by those states that are directly affected.

- New states may be recognized only after they have proven their ability to fulfill particular security, governance, and socioeconomic criteria over a specific period of time.
- Newly recognized states must fulfill specific legal conditions, e.g., the guarantee of minority rights and fair political representation.
- Where necessary, newly recognized states will remain subject to an ongoing international presence in the form of security forces, an international monitoring mission, and/or some type of shared/conditional sovereignty regime possessing clear mandates and enforcement authority.

To a great extent, international policymakers and experts have vigilantly avoided the question of recognizing new states as a potential instrument for dealing with state failure. Nevertheless, it is an issue that plays an important role in the security dynamics of numerous world regions. Resolving the question of whether to (a) consider granting sovereignty to certain new states under carefully stipulated conditions or (b) promote alternative arrangements such as power-sharing, decentralization, and federalism will be key to the settlement of numerous active and frozen conflicts that pose important risks to regional and international security. Putting the issue on the back burner will likely only exacerbate instability and insecurity in the long run. International actors must at least engage in a more open discussion of the feasibility and ramifications of various options – the outcome of the Kosovo status talks may provide a timely stimulus to this debate.

3.4. Regional Solutions

Promoting regional solutions to the problem of weak and failing states is certainly not a new idea. Nevertheless, it is a strategic option that has gained increasing dynamism in recent years, due primarily to two factors. First, international actors have become increasingly aware of the regional dimensions of state failure and the fact that intrastate conflicts present significant threats to regional security and economic growth.⁴³ The most obvious examples here are the Great Lakes and Mano River regions in Africa, the Western Balkans, and the North and South Caucasus. Second, the United Nations simply does not possess the administrative, logistical, financial, human, and military resources to respond effectively in every location where its intervention and assistance is demanded. As a result, affected regions are recognizing the need to take responsibility for promoting security and growth in their own neighborhoods.

Growing emphasis on regional strategies

Regionally oriented strategies to deal with the problem of weak and failing states can take on several dimensions. These include:

- *Strengthening regional organizations to deal with regional security issues.* The most relevant examples here are international efforts to enhance the security capabilities of the African Union (AU) and subregional African organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). While these organizations remain relatively weak, understaffed, and underfunded, they have increasingly adopted policies and peer-review mechanisms that (a) promote regional conflict management and peacekeeping efforts, (b) permit intervention in the internal affairs of member states in order to protect vulnerable populations, and (c) seek to strengthen democratic structures.⁴⁴ The United Nations has made its support

Regional state-building capacities

for regional security organizations increasingly explicit, as both the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change as well as the resolution to establish a UN Peacebuilding Commission emphasize “the need for sustained international support for the efforts and capacity-building of regional and subregional arrangements in carrying out post-conflict peacebuilding activities.”⁴⁵ In addition, the European Union, the United States, and numerous additional bilateral donors provide training and funding to strengthen the conflict management and peacekeeping capacities of regional and subregional organizations, particularly in Africa.⁴⁶

Regional economic
integration

- *Promoting regional economic cooperation and integration.* Greater economic integration in regions affected by state fragility may represent an important tool for enhancing the economic growth that is essential for successful state-building processes. Economic integration can strengthen domestic and regional markets, promote free trade and infrastructural development, create pressure for improved standards and better economic governance, and enhance regional competitiveness on global markets. Such integration may provide incentives that encourage economic actors in fragile states to shift their activities from informal to formal markets. Economic growth and an expanded formal sector would also increase state revenues necessary for the provision of public goods. Recently established regional arrangements such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) will provide important case studies for the potential of economic integration in underdeveloped regions.

Regional development
programs

- *Regional approaches in the provision of development assistance.* Given the fact that insecurity, poor governance, and economic underdevelopment are largely regional phenomena with an enormous potential for spillover, it would make sense for international donors and development agencies to place more emphasis on funding projects and programs within a regional rather than bilateral framework and thereby to promote security, good governance, and economic development at a regional level.⁴⁷ For example, the Dutch government has established regional development assistance programs (in the Great Lakesregion, the Horn of Africa, and the Western Balkans) that focus on the issues of conflict management and post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction.⁴⁸

Regional peacebuilding
conferences

- *Establishing regional peacebuilding conferences.* As an alternative or complement to the more formalized structures of regional organizations, institutionalized regional conferences represent an additional mechanism for promoting region-wide approaches to peace and development. Past and current regional conferences such as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the International Conference on Peace, Security, and Democracy in the Great Lakes Region provide examples of institutionalized yet more loosely structured forums for dialogue that can promote information-sharing, transparency, trust-building, and the development of common principles and strategies. In regions where the material and psychological ravages of violent conflict remain fresh and processes of cooperation are still in their beginning stages, such conferences can set a diplomatic process in motion that lays the ground for longer-term cooperation. They should ideally include national and local leaders, international organizations and donors, and civil society actors and address regional issues such as security sector reform, weapons proliferation, effective gover-

nance, trade and development, minority rights, the distribution of natural resources, and donor policy coherence. Such conferences should take place with the explicit support of international and/or regional organizations such as the United Nations and the African Union.⁴⁹

4. Conclusion

Policymakers and scholars have become increasingly adept at describing the core functions of states as well as the characteristics and consequences of state weakness, failure, and collapse. However, while we may have a good grasp of the problem, we have been much less successful in finding answers to basic strategic and institutional questions of how to deal effectively with the multifaceted problems associated with fragile states. The central *strategic* questions include: Where should the international community intervene, and when? What state-building instruments work best, and is there a particular sequencing that must be adhered to? Is there a “minimum” of stateness that can be established through targeted instruments which enable a virtuous cycle of stability and development, or is state-building possible only as a comprehensive, long-term mission? And, perhaps most importantly, what level of “stateness” should international actors strive realistically to achieve: basic security and stability, the establishment of solid institutional structures, or full-fledged liberal democracies? Crucial *institutional* questions include: What sorts of institutional structures, decision-making mechanisms, and changes in international law are required to deploy state-building instruments effectively? Does the issue of state-building require a much higher institutional profile in order for policymaking to become more effective? In other words, do we need cabinet- or ministerial-level departments specifically tasked with creating interdepartmental strategies to address the problem of fragile states, so that there are stronger mandates, greater financial resources, and above all a clearer delegation of responsibility for developing and implementing policies that really work?

Key strategic and institutional questions

Some important steps can be taken by key international actors. First, the European Union must push forward with the development of CFSP and ESDP and strengthen those units tasked with civil-military conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. In addition, the coordination of foreign, security, and development policy within European institutions as well as between European institutions and individual member states must be improved. These efforts should feed into the formulation of an EU strategy toward fragile states along the lines of the already existing EU strategies against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Second, the United States must continue to strengthen the civilian component of its security capabilities, but these efforts must be accompanied by a clear shift away from unilateralism toward greater cooperation with other regional and international actors. Third, the United Nations and its constituent member states must make every effort to ensure that the Peacebuilding Commission is not rendered impotent by inadequate funding and internecine quarrels over membership and mandate. Finally, mechanisms for coordination among these leading actors – as well as with other regional and subregional organizations, international financial institutions, and non-state actors – must be improved. A central priority here must be the strengthening of “jointness” in analysis and assessment, strategy formulation and implementation, and the division of responsibilities. The recent Multinational Experiment to enhance civil-military coordination in post-conflict situations – encompassing seven countries and NATO, with the European Union and the United Nations as observers – may represent a useful step in this direction.⁵⁰

Enhancing multi-level coordination and coherence

International actors possess limited financial, human, and material resources for dealing with the dozens of fragile states throughout the world. Constructive steps have been taken to improve policymaking in the fields of conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, and development assistance. Yet it is not clear how long the international community and its publics will be willing to bear the costs of long-term, comprehensive post-conflict reconstruction projects and repeated “big pushes” in foreign aid. Several more targeted, differentiated instruments and strategies for addressing the problem of state-building have been presented above. While each of these approaches leaves key questions unanswered, they deserve closer consideration and scrutiny from policymakers seeking to make good policy decisions with scarce resources. At the very least, the way forward must be characterized by enhanced coordination and coherence at the national, regional, and international levels.

Notes

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- 2) See, e.g., Robert C. Orr (ed.), *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (Washington, D.C.: The CSIS Press, 2004).
- 3) Draft resolution submitted by the President of the General Assembly, “The Peacebuilding Commission,” 14 December 2005, <http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/60/L.40&Lang=E> (downloaded 22 December 2005).
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- 8) <http://www.postconflict.gov.uk>
- 9) http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/aussenpolitik/friedenspolitik/ziv_km/aktionsplan_html
- 10) Dutch Directorate-General for International Cooperation, “Mutual Interests, Mutual Responsibilities: Dutch Development Cooperation en route to 2015,” The Hague, 3 October 2003. Available under http://www.minbuza.nl/default.asp?CMS_TCP=tcpAsset&id=683A05F9C3D647A59C222CE7BE9586C4X1X49856X86 (downloaded 30 November 2005)
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- 12) “U.S. Directive Prioritizes Post-conflict Capability,” *Washington Post*, 1 December 2005.
- 13) See, e.g., *In the Wake of War: Improving U.S. Post-conflict Capabilities*, the 2005 report of an independent task force sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and led by former National Security Advisors Samuel Berger and Brent Scowcroft (http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Post-Conflict_Capabilities_final.pdf); Jeremy M. Weinstein, John Edward Porter, and Stuart E. Eizenstat, *On the Brink: Weak States and US National Security*, Center for Global Development, June 2004 (http://www.cgdev.org/doc/books/weakstates/Full_Report.pdf).
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- 16) See Tobias Debiel, "Wie weiter mit effektiver Krisenprävention? Der Aktionsplan der Bundesregierung im Vergleich zu den britischen Conflict Prevention Pools," *Die Friedens-Warte* 79:3-4 (2004), p. 295.
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- 18) International Crisis Group, "EU Crisis Response Capability Revisited," p. 14.
- 19) Thalif Deen, "U.N.'s Peacebuilding Commission Off to a Slow Start," *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 13 February 2006.
- 20) Illuminating analyses include Nicolas van de Walle, *Overcoming Stagnation in Aid-dependent Countries* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2005); Nancy Birdsall et al., "How to Help Poor Countries," *Foreign Affairs* 84:4 (July/August 2005); and Rajan Raghuram and Arvind Subramanian, "What Undermines Aid's Impact on Growth?" International Monetary Fund Working Paper 05/126, June 2005.
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- 27) Stephen Krasner, "Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States," *International Security* 29:2 (Fall 2004), p. 85.
- 28) Marina Ottaway and Stefan Mair, "States at Risk and Failed States: Putting Security First," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace/Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Policy Outlook, September 2004.
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- 33) Krasner, "Sharing Sovereignty," pp. 113-118.
- 34) See, e.g., Larry Diamond, "Building Democracy after Conflict: Lessons from Iraq," *Journal of Democracy* 16:1 (January 2005), p. 17.
- 35) Judy Batt and Dov Lynch, "What Is a 'Failing State' and When Is It a Security Threat?," background paper presented to the seminar on Failing States and the EU's Security Agenda, EU Institute for Security Studies, 8 November 2004.
- 36) Ottaway and Mair, pp. 1-3.
- 37) For example, Ottaway and Mair use the example of Sierra Leone to argue that small, well-equipped, and well-trained deployments of international security forces (ideally under the supervision of a lead nation, such as the United Kingdom in this case) can prevent the escalation of conflict and establish a level of stability that enables recovery and reconstruction to take place (Ottaway and Mair, pp. 4-5).
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- 48) Dutch Directorate-General for International Cooperation, pp. 16-17.
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