FRAGILE STATES

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Violence and the Failure of Intervention

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Introduction

War and Conflict in Today's World

Something has happened when it comes to war and conflict in today's world. It is not that violent conflict has disappeared; there is plenty of it, and some conflicts are even more destructive and devastating in terms of human cost than previously. But we commonly think about large-scale violent conflict – that is, war – as something that takes place between two or more countries. The very definition of war in *Webster's Dictionary* reflects this view; war is simply defined as 'a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations'.

It is this kind of thinking about war which is increasingly obsolete. In the first half of the twentieth century, conflict escalated into two world wars. Since then, the number of interstate wars has been in decline. This trend has continued after the end of the Cold War. Since 1989, there have been a total of 128 armed conflicts – most of them minor, 48 of them wars (defined as armed conflict in which at least 1,000 people are killed, or killed yearly). Only eight of these conflicts were interstate; the rest of them were *intrastate* (Harbom and Wallensteen, 2009).

We have therefore experienced a fundamental shift in the nature of armed conflict, including war. Such conflict is now much more *intrastate* than it is *interstate*. However, in some cases these intrastate conflicts were internationalized in the sense that an external state or group of states intervened in the conflict, as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

where several neighbouring states supported one side or the other. In the case of the Georgia war of 2008, a Russian force supported the Ossetians against Georgia. In 1999, NATO intervened in the Serbian war in Kosovo, and in 2011, it intervened in the uprising in Libya. Still, these conflicts are primarily intrastate, related to the peculiar characteristics of the countries affected by violence. These countries are widely defined as fragile states. State fragility is not automatically accompanied by a breakdown of order and collective violence. New research rather shows that the absence of a consolidated state may be compensated by various other ways of governance (Hagmann and Péclard, 2010: 542). Nevertheless, where there *is* large-scale, intrastate violence there tends to be state fragility. For that reason, it is necessary to engage in the analysis of fragile states in order to understand what it is that generates and shapes war and conflict today, the theme of the book series of which this volume is a part.

This book offers such an inquiry. In concrete terms, the book will clarify the concept of 'fragile state' and discuss it in relation to other popular concepts such as 'weak' and 'failed' states; explain how fragile states emerge in terms of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history; set forth the core characteristics of fragile statehood as a Weberian ideal type, but also address the differences between countries owing to dissimilar trajectories; analyse the connection between fragile statehood and violent conflict with special reference to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and Haiti; analyse the role of international society in relation to fragile statehood and explain – again with special reference to the three cases – why the role of outsiders in addressing the problems is necessarily limited; identify a few successes – that is, countries which 'ought to be' fragile, but which are not, owing to particular circumstances; and offer a (pessimistic) view of the future of most fragile states.

The Decreasing Importance of Interstate War

Some commentators believe that the decline in interstate wars will be reversed. They claim that 'the world has become normal again', in the sense that 'nations remain as strong as ever, and so too the nationalist ambitions, the passions, and the competition among nations that have shaped history' (Kagan, 2007: 1). From this view, the rise of non-democratic powers like China and Russia will pave the way for aggressive power balancing and potential violent conflict.

But there are strong arguments for diagnosing a more permanent transformation of interstate relations. First, there are a number of consolidated liberal democracies in the international system; they have created a very high level of economic, political and social integration among themselves. In the context of the EU, the development of supranational authority and free movement across borders set a new framework where countries may continue to be formally independent, but at the same time are deeply integrated in a cross-border community. In such a framework, the use of organized violence to solve conflicts is no longer an option; the countries which waged two world wars have within a few decades become a security community (Adler and Barnett, 1998; Deutsch et al., 1957).

The forces of political and economic integration are relevant elsewhere also, and that further reduces the risk of interstate war. The newly emerging powers – such as Brazil, China, India or South Africa – know that the road to success involves deep involvement in economic globalization; by no means does it call for territorial conquest. In this sense, these countries are following the 'trading state' path set by Japan and Germany after the Second World War (Rosecrance, 1986, 1999), even though they believe in having considerable military capabilities reinforcing their bid for voice on the global level. Secondly, new regional communities such as the African

Union (AU), the Union of South American States (UNASUR) and the Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have the potential to develop into security communities, though they may differ from the Western type referred to above. Thirdly, there is some hope that the normative basis of global co-operation may be strengthened by further democratization, although 'the third wave' of democratization identified by Samuel Huntington in many instances got stuck and resulted in 'defect democracies'.

These changes have been accompanied by increasing respect for the 'territorial integrity norm' – that is, 'the proscription that force should not be used to alter interstate boundaries' (Zacher, 2001: 215). That norm emerged in the context of the League of Nations after the First World War. It was generally accepted as an element in the UN Charter in 1945 and it has been strengthened since the mid-1970s. Thus, from 1976 to the present, 'no major cases of successful territorial aggrandizement have occurred' (Zacher, 2001: 237). In short, classical war between states is either irrelevant (among consolidated liberal democracies) or in sharp decline (among emerging economies and other modernizing states). Our argument is not that interstate war will never take place again. In some regions, such as the Middle East or in Kashmir, there is a continuing risk of war between states. But large-scale violent conflict is now overwhelmingly intrastate, taking place in fragile states, though, as stated above, not all fragile states are equally conflict prone and the frequency of intrastate conflict varies as well.

Fragile States: A Different Kind of Statehood

We may feel that we have always lived in a world of sovereign states. However, the global system of sovereign states is actually quite recent and developed as a result of the pro-

cess of decolonization following the Second World War. The system of states has been greatly expanded since then, with the number of member states of the United Nations growing from 5 at its founding in 1945 to its current membership of 192. Western-style modern states, with polities based on law, order and centralized rule, developed economies and defined nations (i.e. groups of people which make up a legal, cultural and emotional community), developed to full maturity only in the twentieth century and in non-linear ways (see the emergence of Fascism and Stalinism). Human history, then, is not a history of sovereign statehood; far from it. During most of human history most people have resided in communities with overlapping loyalties or empires with contested borders. These communities lacked the major features which are usually associated with contemporary sovereign states. The study of international relations has tended to underline the similarities of states; that is, to treat states as 'like units'. J. D. B. Miller expressed it in the following way: 'Just as we know a camel or a chair when we see one, so we know a sovereign state. It is a political entity which is treated as a sovereign state by other sovereign states' (Miller, 1981: 16). For many realist scholars of international relations, the sovereign state is a given point of departure and not a subject of investigation; focus is on the relations between states, not on their different qualities.

Economic liberals, in contrast, address the (internal) characteristics of states. But they, too, follow a uniform image of a functioning state in as much as they have tended to see weak and fragile statehood as a transitory stage of development which would be solved once Third World countries followed the same developmental path as taken earlier by the developed countries in the West: a progressive journey from a traditional, pre-industrial, agrarian, non-democratic society towards a modern, industrial, democratic mass-consumption society. But this evolutionary view is wrong; there is no

in-built law of history ensuring that progress and modernity as we now understand them will emerge.

In terms of the long lines of history, the state as it currently exists is a relatively new arrival. That insight should prompt us to study historical trajectories of state formation in different parts of the world. When we do so, we recognize that the historical pathways to statehood are characterized by extreme variation: early state formation in China had little resemblance to later state formation in Russia; state formation in Western Europe was even different from that in the USA (Darwin, 2007). The larger point is that there is no linear process leading from the communities of hunters and gatherers to the modern nation-state. Rather, state formation proceeds in dissimilar ways and moves in different directions. The path taken to effective, democratic and economically robust statehood in Europe and North America has not been replicated in many parts of the world, even as all countries have adopted the formal characteristics of sovereign statehood and in this sense may be considered as part of a global culture of the nation-state (Meyer et al., 1997). In earlier days, many of the entities which we now characterize as fragile states were not sovereign members of the international system of states. Most often these entities were colonies or tributary entities, dependent on and dominated by the colonial motherland or hegemonic powers. Today, the sovereign state system is a global institution. The contemporary system contains a range and variety of states that are far more diverse not only in terms of their cultures, religions, languages and ideologies, but also in their forms of government, military capacity, levels of economic development, and so on, than ever before precisely because former dependencies are now part of the system.

Nonetheless, with all the heterogeneity in the world of states, there are some basic functions which all states are expected to fulfil in order to merit being called states. Among these

are the provision of both security and material well-being. Failures to provide these two functions are not simply expressions of doing things differently but also evidence of doing them badly. In this sense, the terminology of failed, weak or fragile states is not only descriptive, but also has a normative connotation: states are not functioning as they should. This terminology is, of course, inspired by the Weberian ideal type of a modern bureaucratic state. Looking through these lenses may tempt us to ignore the variety of ways in which weak government may be compensated by strong societies (Migdal, 1998). Thus, speaking in terms of state failure, weakness or fragility may reflect more our image of a well-functioning state than the realities on the ground. However, if there is a persistent gap between the ideals to which the self-description of states refers, on the one hand, and the practice of governance, on the other, then there is good reason to address this gap and its domestic and international consequences. In this sense we use fragile statehood as a term which highlights the failures of governance in specific structural settings.

Fragile states, then, may not be on the path towards the Weberian model of a state. Rather, they may be dominated by social forces and political groups who use the language of modernity and development to legitimize the exploitation of the state as a source of private enrichment. This is one of the factors which abets violent conflict, though the causal relations between state fragility are quite complex, as we will discuss in chapter 3.

The Debate about Fragile States and the Contribution of This Book

The concept of 'fragile states' is a recent invention. From the 1960s and up to the end of the Cold War, politicians and scholars were concerned about 'developing countries', 'newly

independent nations' or 'post-colonial states'. The domi-
nant view of these entities was informed by Western, liberal
modernization theory: it claimed that tradition would soon
make room for modernity and that the less developed coun-
tries, therefore, would follow in the footsteps of the Western
vanguard. This view was a result of the profound optimism
sparked by the rapid development of Britain in the nine-
teenth century and of the USA in the twentieth. John Stuart
Mill claimed that 'whoever knows the political economy of
England, or even Yorkshire, knows that of all nations, actual
or possible' (quoted from Kingston-Mann, 1999: 132). This
modernization view was propagated by many Western observ-
ers during the Cold War; it was a way of emphasizing the
developed countries of the West as the attractive and natural
model of development for latecomers.

Paradoxically, this optimistic view faded when Western
thought seemed triumphant. For a brief moment the end of
the Cold War sparked Western euphoria, animated by the
notion of the 'end of history'. With the breakdown of social-
ism, modernity and liberal democracy seemed to arrive
everywhere and much quicker than expected. But the mood
soon darkened owing to the lack of progress in many poor
countries combined with the persistence of old and the emer-
gence of new violent conflict, now mostly within fragile states.
In the mid-1990s, the tyranny, lawlessness, crime, disease,
environmental stress and demographic pressures of West
Africa led Robert Kaplan to claim that major parts of the world
were descending into chaos. For that reason the most impor-
tant feature of the new world (dis-)order in his view was one
of 'the coming anarchy' (Kaplan, 1994). Such fears escalated
after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Epitomizing
the new mood, the National Security Strategy of the United
States of 2002 stated that the country was now threatened
less by conquering states than by failing ones. The European

Union followed suit by claiming, in its 2003 Security Strategy, that state fragility constituted a major threat to European security.

Thus, failing, weak or fragile states, as they are mostly called today, have become a central issue not only of development cooperation but also of security politics in the West. However, though the concept is new, the problem behind it is not, and it is most likely to last. It is for this very reason that the issue has generated extensive academic work. Much of this work focuses on finding certain keys for explaining state fragility, like ethnic cleavages, patrimonialism or the resource curse. The present analysis focuses on combining the identification of common features of state fragility with addressing variation in state performance (di John, 2010: 24). We do so by looking specifically into the interaction between domestic and international factors. In pursuing this course, we will focus on the linkage between state fragility, collective violence and the use of force in dealing with fragile states.

We proceed on the assumption that the modernization view prevailing during the first two decades after decolonization was misleading because it misinterpreted both the past and the future. In the past, as we will discuss more fully in the next chapter, states around the world had experienced trajectories which are radically different from the typical path taken by the now developed West. The future, of course, is not predetermined. There is no guarantee, nor is it even very likely, that most fragile states will follow in the footsteps of the consolidated and successful ones. Just as their historical experiences are different from the successful states, their futures are most likely different as well, as we will discuss in chapter 2.

The earliest radical critique of modernization theory, developed in the late 1960s and onwards, came from neo-Marxist dependency theorists. They emphasized that peripheral states in the capitalist world system had been subjected to

underdevelopment as a consequence of the process by which capitalist forces from the developed core countries expanded to subdue and impoverish the Third World. The argument proposed that earlier forms of society in the Third World may have been *un*developed, but *under*development began only with the arrival of global capitalism. That is, global capitalism in one single process generates development and wealth (in the industrialized world) and underdevelopment and poverty (in the Third World).

Radical dependency theory has a point: external domination is a major element in the formation of fragile states, as we argue in chapter 2. But dependency scholars also downplayed or ignored domestic factors in their analyses, such as the role of domestic elites. With independence, the latter became increasingly important for the political and social development of the respective countries. Thus, fragile states have emerged from a mixture of domestic and international conditions, both of which are fundamentally unlike anything experienced by the successful states in the West.

As pointed out above, state fragility became an issue with the outbreak (or persistence) of collective violence in some of the post-colonial states which went along with gross violations of human rights. This violence was mostly attributed to a vicious circle between deficient government, social cleavages and serious shortcomings in economic development. State and nation building, in combination with continued economic assistance and a call for more consistent humanitarian intervention, were the order of the day. Yet, not all states with limited territorial control and a weak economy experienced violence. Thus, there is need for a closer look at the linkage between fragile states and violent conflict. We deal with these issues in chapter 3.

September 11, 2001, set a different context for the debate about fragile states. The 9/11 attacks helped re-emphasize the

Bush administration's priority given to national security, but it also changed the attitude towards involvement in fragile states. The 2002 US National Security Strategy pledged to

> extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world. The 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: 2)

In other words, the humanitarian impulse towards intervention was supplemented by a national security impulse. Some commentators hoped that this would 'stiffen humanitarianism with the iron fist of national security' (Farer, 2003: 88–9). But national security concerns and humanitarian concerns do not always overlap; the security factor has not helped amplify the humanitarian factor (Jentleson, 2007: 284). Humanitarian concerns are still in play, but only 'selectively on the basis of "national interests" of the interveners' (Bellamy, 2004: 145). In sum, the policy of active intervention in fragile states has been much strengthened compared to the Cold War days in the sense that humanitarian and/or security concerns may lead to intervention, including intervention by force, in such states (Geis et al., 2006). But intervention remains highly selective, undertaken in some cases but not in other cases, even if humanitarian (e.g. Sudan, Myanmar) and/or security (e.g. Iran, Pakistan) concerns would seem to point in that direction.

When intervention is eventually undertaken by the use of significant force in the contemporary era, the purpose is not an old-fashioned conquest. The purpose is rather to replace a weak state by a strong state in the sense of promoting state