

## **“Threats of Weak, Fragile, Failing States and Mitigation Strategies”**

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Any president's national security strategy, including President Bush's, in one form or another addresses the question of "weak", "fragile" and, in recent cases, "failing" or "failed" states. The definition by its nature is ambiguous, manipulative, and a little confusing. In order to make my arguments clear I am going to employ US government's definition of a "weak", "fragile" and "failing" state:

"Failing states are countries in which the central government does not exert effective control over, nor is it able to deliver vital services to, significant parts of its own territory due to conflict, ineffective governance, or state collapse. Current examples include Afghanistan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan.

Weak states—those in which the central government's hold on power and/or territory is tenuous—also pose a serious threat. They are often countries emerging from, or on the brink of, conflict such as Angola, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Burundi, and Cote D'Ivoire. Others, like Colombia, have relatively strong central governments but are cause for concern, due to their lack of control over parts of their territory. Still others, including Pakistan, Georgia, Albania, Yemen, Nigeria, and Indonesia, are fragile, if not yet clearly weak states."<sup>1</sup>

The concept of a "weak" or "fragile" state is not new, a variety of historical examples indicate that some empires had failed to exert effective control over its peripheries (Dutch, British and Spanish empires), while other empires have collapsed due to ineffective governance and from exogenous conflicts (Roman and Persian empires). If history serves to indicate the future, some "weak" or "fragile" states can become influential world players (Roman Empire), while others simply "fail" (Persian Empire).

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<sup>1</sup> "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" issued by President George W. Bush on September 20, 2002.

In contemporary setting, such states pose a number of obstacles to democratic governance and to international security. President Bush argues that these states provide convenient operational bases and “safe heavens” for international terrorists. This problem emerges from three main reasons: porous borders, weak law enforcement and security services, and influences exerted by terrorist organizations. One must note that through such influence on “weak” states terrorist organizations could exploit local resources to fund their operations, recruit forces from the local population where poverty and religious fundamentalism amalgamate.<sup>2</sup>

Some African countries and Middle East countries serve as empirical evidence of such activity. From Egypt to Mauritania, Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations have used these countries as sanctuaries. Countries like Sudan and Uganda, Cote D'Ivoire and Algeria lack effective central government and have fueled, through financing and sheltering, various international terrorist groups.<sup>3</sup>

Another important rationale on why “fragile” states represent a threat to international security: they generate wider regional conflicts. Regional conflicts can undermine democratic governance edifice and deteriorate developments in neighboring countries. For instance, the Kosovo conflict in the FYR (Former Yugoslav Republic) frightened many development organizations and terrified potential investors in providing their services to countries surrounding the ethnic clash.<sup>4</sup> In another region of the world, the war in Chechnya retarded political stability

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2 Kagan, Robert. 'The Ungreat Washed: Why democracy must remain America's goal abroad.' Pg 1-11.

3 Jackson H. Robert, Rosenberg G. Carl, 'Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood' p. 9 -15, 1982 World Politics, Princeton University

4 Shattuck, John, (1996) 'Human Rights and Humanitarian Crises: Policy Making and the Media' in Rotberg and Weiss (1996) From Massacres to Genocide: The Media, Public Policy and Humanitarian Crises. Washington: Brookings: 169-178.

in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Ethnic clashes spilled over borders into these countries and caused further problems to their democratization developments.

Another explanatory variable is the cost of “weak” or “fragile” states inability to govern: forced relocation, weapons proliferation, unnecessary resources spent on humanitarian and peacekeeping assistance, and from the financial perspective, the opportunity costs of lost trade and investment. The World Trade Organization estimated that if trade with “weak” countries increased by just 25%, the populations living under poverty line in these countries would decrease by 45%.<sup>5</sup> Due to their “fragile” state countries like Colombia and Afghanistan due fell into drug production and distribution, in addition to human trafficking; such activities further weaken international security and democratic governance.

The challenges to international security posed by “weak” and “failing” states are significant and growing. Numerous authors, analysts, and policymakers have identified the phenomenon as one of the central problems of security in the post-Cold War world. Brian Atwood, head of the Agency for International Development (AID), concluded that "disintegrating societies and weak states...have emerged as the greatest menace to global stability," and he considers them a "strategic threat." Former president Bill Clinton calls the "wars of national debilitation" that occur in these weak states "...the new core problem in post-Cold War politics that a new strategy must address." If the arguments outlined in the beginning of my paper are in fact accurate, then at least one critical question is obvious: How should the external actors respond to the threats produced by the “weak” states? Indeed, this

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<sup>5</sup> World Bank (1997). World Development Report 1997. The State in a Changing World, New York: Oxford University Press.

question is the primary focus of the international community in the twenty first century.<sup>6</sup>

One of the first questions we must answer is whether we want to respond at all. In its simplest form we must know whether the international community will choose some variation of engagement or opt instead for a variation of isolationism. If the grand strategy is largely one of isolationism or extremely limited engagement, then much of the discussion that follows is irrelevant. If the international community sees no need to respond and can effectively counteract public protests for such a “no-response”, the answer to the question of choice of strategy is obvious: No response. However, such a universal “no response” strategy is very difficult if not impossible to sustain in the world today. Hence we must consider the range of possible responses from the highly limited end of the response continuum to the full engagement end.

Before we can address the issue of how to respond, we should consider the variety of objectives. We must decide what it is that confronts us. Is it in fact a weak or fragile state? We must decide what we want to accomplish; in other words, what is our objective? At the full engagement end of the spectrum, and therefore the most ambitious, is the objective of establishing legitimate democratic governance. At the other end of the range lie more limited objectives, such as responding only to the immediate manifestations or consequences of state weakness. This could include efforts to alleviate starvation, poverty, and other forms of human suffering, but without addressing the root causes of that dilemma. Let us consider some examples of possible responses across this continuum of objectives:

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<sup>6</sup> World Bank (1997). World Development Report 1997. The State in a Changing World, New York: Oxford University Press.

Immediate response: Stop the conflict – Bosnia and Cyprus are a few regions where the international community (NATO, UN) has stepped in to stop the fighting and diminish the escalating conflict. The presence of the international peacekeeping mission in Somalia yields a universal understanding that without such forces the probability of intensification of the conflict is high. In fact, it is also evident that military presence without necessary humanitarian relief programs or economic engagement will not resolve the issue of “weak” or “fragile” states. Without such programs, military presence could become long-term or permanent as we witness in Bosnia today.<sup>7</sup>

Immediate response: Humanitarian Relief – This is a limited response to the problem of “weak” or “fragile” states. If there are pressing humanitarian problems like we observed in Somalia, Sudan, or Afghanistan, the international community might be willing to attempt to alleviate this problem through humanitarian assistance. But the predicament is clear: the international community will have to deal with the local government however corrupt and abusive; in addition, unbalanced and disproportional distribution of food and other humanitarian items would result in perturbation of the conflict.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps when addressing the humanitarian relief strategy the international community should keep in mind that their efforts would not yield “false hopes” for improving the overall situation, after all, distributing food and clothing has never helped “weak” states from improving their political situations.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that in addition to the immediate response methods, long-term programs are needed.

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<sup>7</sup> Bennett, Christopher (1995). *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse-Causes Course and Consequences*, London: Hurst and Company.

<sup>8</sup> Clapham, Christopher (1996). *Africa and the International System. The Politics of State Survival*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Lyons, Terrence and Ahmed Samatar (1995) 'Somalia'. *Brookings Occasional Paper*.

Long-term response: Economic Growth and Development – critics to this strategy would argue that it is impossible to achieve economic stability and increase economic activity if the state is “weak” and has unstable political structure. They fail to recognize that any political structure however corrupt and unrecognized would seek to enhance economic performance in order to finance their political credibility. This gives some playing field for the international community to engage in a dialogue with “weak” states on improving their socio-economic situation. There are modern day examples when the middle class within “weak” state has emerged it managed to change the political regime of that state and improve its overall conditions: Georgia (rose revolution), Poland (solidarity movement), Ukraine (orange revolution), Czechoslovakia (velvet revolution), etc. It is the exact position of the European Union when dealing with rogue states like North Korea or Iran, through the improvement of their economic situations, note change must be internal, the new middle class will emerge ultimately dictating the future of these states.<sup>10</sup> However economic rejuvenation can only occur if there is some, although limited, political rejuvenation. Establishing democratic governance in “weak” or “fragile” states becomes the key objective of the international community.

Long-term response: Establish democratic governance – This strategy fuses all previous response methods and full-scale approach is established. Previously we have determined the obstacles “weak” or “fragile” states pose to international security and democratic governance. The objective is ultimately to remove such obstacles through the means of political, economic, and, in some cases, military responses. If we are trying to repair “weak” states, than the complete panoply of agents must be involved (States, UN, other international institutions, NGOs, PVOs,

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson, Chalmers (1987). "Political Institutions and Economic Performance", pp. 136-65 in Fred C. Deyo (ed.), *The Political Economy of New Industrialism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

and many others). We should never “not engage” in improving “weak” states on various levels, yet, a considerable thought must be given before a full commitment for the reasons prescribed above: it will require long term action.

Threats posed by “weak” states can be resolved only through the application of a wide-range of policy instruments, economic development, humanitarian relief, and, in some cases military intervention. International community should expect some positive changes only if we apply long-term response strategy. Comprehensive response in addition to the international cooperation and consideration would successfully establish democratic governance in “weak” or “fragile” states. After all any broad response consists of individual strategies, and through the use of existing infrastructures, because there is always a base to begin: institutions, offices that are staffed with fairly well-educated, competent, and honest civil servants, groups and organizations, however small, that do what they can to promote development.<sup>11</sup> Supporting these groups helps promote local processes of development. There are no quick fixes for “weak” states, and to the democratic governance and international security.

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<sup>11</sup> Fukuyama Frances, ‘The Imperative of State-Building’, *Journal of Democracy* 15.2 (2004) pg. 10-12.