

# *Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators*

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Nation-states fail because they are convulsed by internal violence and can no longer deliver positive political goods to their inhabitants. Their governments lose legitimacy, and the very nature of the particular nation-state itself becomes illegitimate in the eyes and in the hearts of a growing plurality of its citizens.

The rise and fall of nation-states is not new, but in a modern era when national states constitute the building blocks of legitimate world order the violent disintegration and palpable weakness of selected African, Asian, Oceanic, and Latin American states threaten the very foundation of that system. International organizations and big powers consequently find themselves sucked disconcertingly into a maelstrom of anomic internal conflict and messy humanitarian relief. Desirable international norms such as stability and predictability thus become difficult to achieve when so many of the globe's newer nation-states waver precariously between weakness and failure, with some truly failing, or even collapsing. In a time of terror, moreover, appreciating the nature of and responding to the dynamics of nation-state failure have become central to critical policy debates. How best to strengthen weak states and prevent state failure are among the urgent questions of the twenty-first century.

This book examines contemporary cases of nation-state collapse and failure.<sup>1</sup> It establishes clear criteria for distinguishing collapse and failure from generic weakness or apparent distress, and collapse from failure. It further analyzes the nature of state weakness and advances reasons why some weak states

succumb to failure, or collapse, and why others in ostensibly more straightened circumstances remain weak and at risk without ever destructing. Characterizing failed states is thus an important and relevant endeavor, especially because the phenomenon of state failure is under-researched, hitherto with imprecise definitions and a paucity of sharply argued, instructive, and well-delineated cases. Further, understanding exactly why weak states slide toward failure will help policymakers to design methods to prevent failure and, in the cases of states that nevertheless fail (or collapse), to revive them and assist in the rebuilding process.

States are much more varied in their capacity and capability than they once were. They are more numerous than they were a half century ago, and the range of their population sizes, physical endowments, wealth, productivity, delivery systems, ambitions, and attainments is much more extensive than ever before. In 1914, in the wake of the crumbling of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, there were fifty-five recognized national polities. In 1919, there were fifty-nine nations. In 1950, that number had reached sixty-nine. Ten years later, after the attainment of independence in much of Africa, ninety were nations. After many more African, Asian, and Oceanic territories had become independent, and after the implosion of the Soviet Union, the number of nations jumped to 191; East Timor's independence in 2002 brought that total to 192. Given such explosive numbers, the inherent fragility of many of the new recruits (fifteen of Africa's fifty-four states are landlocked), and the inherent navigational perils of the post-Cold War economic and political terrain, the possibility of failure among a subset of the total remains ever present.

### **Strength and Weakness**

Nation-states exist to provide a decentralized method of delivering political (public) goods to persons living within designated parameters (borders). Having replaced the monarchs of old, modern states focus and answer the concerns and demands of citizenries. They organize and channel the interests of their people, often but not exclusively in furtherance of national goals and values. They buffer or manipulate external forces and influences, champion the local or particular concerns of their adherents, and mediate between the constraints and challenges of the international arena and the dynamism of their own internal economic, political, and social realities.

States succeed or fail across all or some of these dimensions. But it is according to their performance—according to the levels of their effective delivery of the most crucial political goods—that strong states may be distinguished from weak ones, and weak states from failed or collapsed states. Political goods

are those intangible and hard to quantify claims that citizens once made on sovereigns and now make on states. They encompass expectations, conceivably obligations, inform the local political culture, and together give content to the social contract between ruler and ruled that is at the core of regime/government and citizenry interactions.<sup>2</sup>

There is a hierarchy of political goods. None is as critical as the supply of security, especially human security. Individuals alone, almost exclusively in special or particular circumstances, can attempt to secure themselves. Or groups of individuals can band together to organize and purchase goods or services that maximize their sense of security. Traditionally, and usually, however, individuals and groups cannot easily or effectively substitute private security for the full spectrum of public security. The state's prime function is to provide that political good of security—to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their disputes with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion.

The delivery of a range of other desirable political goods becomes possible when a reasonable measure of security has been sustained. Modern states (as successors to sovereigns) provide predictable, recognizable, systematized methods of adjudicating disputes and regulating both the norms and the prevailing mores of a particular society or polity. The essence of that political good usually implies codes and procedures that together constitute an enforceable rule of law, security of property and inviolable contracts, a judicial system, and a set of values that legitimize and validate the local version of fair play.

Another key political good enables citizens to participate freely, openly, and fully in politics and the political process. This good encompasses the essential freedoms: the right to compete for office; respect and support for national and regional political institutions, like legislatures and courts; tolerance of dissent and difference; and fundamental civil and human rights.

Other political goods typically supplied by states (although privatized forms are possible) and expected by their citizenries include medical and health care (at varying levels and costs); schools and educational instruction (of various kinds and levels)—the knowledge good; roads, railways, harbors, and other physical infrastructures—the arteries of commerce; communications infrastructures; a money and banking system, usually presided over by a central bank and lubricated by a national currency; a beneficent fiscal and institutional context within which citizens can pursue personal entrepreneurial goals and potentially prosper; the promotion of civil society; and methods of regulating the

sharing of the environmental commons. Together, this bundle of political goods, roughly rank ordered, establishes a set of criteria according to which modern nation-states may be judged strong, weak, or failed.

Strong states obviously perform well across these categories and with respect to each, separately. Weak states show a mixed profile, fulfilling expectations in some areas and performing poorly in others. The more poorly weak states perform, criterion by criterion, the weaker they become, and the more that weakness tends to edge toward failure, hence the subcategory of weakness that is termed *failing*. Many failed states flunk each of the tests outlined above. But they need not flunk all of them to fail overall, particularly since satisfying the security good weighs very heavily, and high levels of internal violence are associated directly with failure and the propensity to fail. Yet, violence alone does not condition failure, and the absence of violence does not necessarily imply that the state in question is not failed. It is necessary to judge the extent to which an entire failing or failed profile is less or more than its component parts.

*Strong* states unquestionably control their territories and deliver a full range and a high quality of political goods to their citizens. They perform well according to indicators like GDP per capita, the UNDP Human Development Index, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, and Freedom House's *Freedom of the World Report*. Strong states offer high levels of security from political and criminal violence, ensure political freedom and civil liberties, and create environments conducive to the growth of economic opportunity. The rule of law prevails. Judges are independent. Road networks are well maintained. Telephones work. Snail mail and e-mail both arrive quickly. Schools, universities, and students flourish. Hospitals and clinics serve patients effectively. And so on. Overall, strong states are places of enviable peace and order.

*Weak* states include a broad continuum of states that are: inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; basically strong, but temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism, or external attacks; and a mixture of the two. Weak states typically harbor ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal tensions that have not yet, or not yet thoroughly, become overtly violent. Urban crime rates tend to be higher and increasing. In weak states, the ability to provide adequate measures of other political goods is diminished or diminishing. Physical infrastructural networks have deteriorated. Schools and hospitals show signs of neglect, particularly outside the main cities. GDP per capita and other critical economic indicators have fallen or are falling, sometimes dramatically; levels of venal corruption are embarrassingly high and escalating. Weak states usually honor rule of law precepts in the breach. They harass civil society. Weak states are often ruled by despots, elected or not.

There is a special category of weak state, as explored in Erin Jenne's chapter. That is the seemingly strong case, always an autocracy, that rigidly controls dissent and is secure but at the same time provides very few political goods. In extreme cases, such as North Korea, the regime permits its people to starve. Cambodia under Pol Pot also qualifies, as does contemporary Belarus, Iraq, and, possibly, Libya. Across recent times, the list of states that are fundamentally weak but appear strong is even more extensive.

### **Failed and Collapsed States**

*Failed* states are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions. In most failed states, government troops battle armed revolts led by one or more rivals. Occasionally, the official authorities in a failed state face two or more insurgencies, varieties of civil unrest, different degrees of communal discontent, and a plethora of dissent directed at the state and at groups within the state.

It is not the absolute intensity of violence that identifies a failed state. Rather, it is the enduring character of that violence (as in Angola, Burundi, and the Sudan), the fact that much of the violence is directed against the existing government or regime, and the inflamed character of the political or geographical demands for shared power or autonomy that rationalize or justify that violence in the minds of the main insurgents.

The civil wars that characterize failed states usually stem from or have roots in ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal enmity. The fear of the other that drives so much ethnic conflict stimulates and fuels hostilities between regimes and subordinate and less favored groups. Avarice also propels that antagonism, especially when greed is magnified by dreams of loot from discoveries of new, contested, sources of resource wealth, like petroleum deposits, diamond fields, other minerals, or timber.

There is no failed state without disharmonies between communities. Yet, the simple fact that many weak nation-states include haves and have-nots, and that some of the newer states contain a heterogeneous array of ethnic, religious, and linguistic interests, is more a contributor to than a root cause of nation-state failure. State failure cannot be ascribed primarily to the inability to build nations from a congeries of groups of diverse backgrounds. Nor should it be ascribed baldly to the oppression of minorities by a majority, although such brutalities are often a major ingredient of the impulse toward failure.

In contrast to strong states, failed states cannot control their borders. They lose authority over sections of territory. Often, the expression of official power is limited to a capital city and one or more ethnically specific zones. Plausibly, the extent of a state's failure can be measured by how much of its geographical

expanse is genuinely controlled (especially after dark) by the official government. How nominal or contested is the central government's sway over peripheral towns and rural roads and waterways? Who really expresses power up-country, or in districts distant from the capital?<sup>3</sup>

Citizens depend on states and central governments to secure their persons and free them from fear. Unable to establish an atmosphere of security nationwide, and often struggling to project power and official authority, the faltering state's failure becomes obvious even before, or as, rebel groups and other contenders threaten the residents of central cities and overwhelm demoralized government contingents, as in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

In most failed states, regimes prey on their own constituents. Driven by ethnic or other intercommunal hostility, or by the governing elite's insecurities, they victimize their own citizens or some subset of the whole that is regarded as hostile. As in Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire or the Taliban's Afghanistan, ruling cadres increasingly oppress, extort, and harass the majority of their own compatriots while privileging a more narrowly based party, clan, or sect. As in Zaire, Angola, Siaka Stevens's Sierra Leone, or pre-2001 Sudan, patrimonial rule depends on a patronage-based system of extraction from ordinary citizens. The typical weak state plunges toward failure when this kind of ruler-led oppression provokes a countervailing reaction on the part of resentful groups or newly emerged rebels.

Another indicator of state failure is the growth of criminal violence. As state authority weakens and fails, and as the state becomes criminal in its oppression of its citizens, so lawlessness becomes more apparent. Criminal gangs take over the streets of the cities. Arms and drug trafficking become more common. Ordinary police forces become paralyzed. Anomic behaviors become the norm. For protection, citizens naturally turn to warlords and other strong figures who express or activate ethnic or clan solidarity, thus offering the possibility of security at a time when all else, and the state itself, is crumbling. High rates of urban crime and the rise of criminal syndicates testify to an underlying anarchy and desperation.

Failed states provide only limited quantities of other essential political goods. They more and more forfeit to upstart warlords and other non-state actors their role as the preferred suppliers of political goods. A failed state is a polity that is no longer able or willing to perform the fundamental jobs of a nation-state in the modern world.

Failed states exhibit flawed institutions. That is, only the institution of the executive functions. If legislatures exist at all, they are rubber-stamping machines. Democratic debate is noticeably absent. The judiciary is derivative of the executive rather than being independent, and citizens know that they can-

not rely on the court system for significant redress or remedy, especially against the state. The bureaucracy has long ago lost its sense of professional responsibility and exists solely to carry out the orders of the executive and, in petty ways, to oppress citizens. The military is possibly the only institution with any remaining integrity, but the armed forces of failed states are often highly politicized, devoid of the esprit that they once demonstrated.

Failed states are typified by deteriorating or destroyed infrastructures. Metaphorically, the more potholes (or main roads turned to rutted tracks), the more a state will exemplify failure. As rulers siphon funds from the state coffers, so there are fewer capital resources for road crews, equipment, and raw materials. Maintaining road or rail access to distant districts becomes less and less of a priority. Even refurbishing basic navigational aids along arterial waterways (as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the DRC) becomes typified by neglect. Where the state still controls such communications backbones as a land-line telephone system, that form of political and economic good betrays a lack of renewal, upkeep, investment, and bureaucratic endeavor. Less a metaphor than a daily reality is the index of failed connections, repeated dialings, and interminable waits for repair and service. If private entrepreneurs have been permitted by the state monopoly to erect cell telephone towers and offer mobile telephone service, such telephones may already have made the monopoly obsolete. Even, or particularly, because there is no state to interfere, in a *collapsed* state privately provided cell telephone systems prevail over what might remain of the land-line network, as in Somalia.

When a state has failed or is in the process of failing, the effective educational and health systems are privatized (with a resulting hodgepodge of shady schools and questionable medical clinics in the cities), or the public facilities become increasingly decrepit and neglected. Teachers, physicians, nurses, and orderlies are paid late or not at all, and absenteeism increases. Textbooks and medicines become scarce. X-ray machines break down and are not repaired. Reports to the relevant ministries are ignored. Citizens, especially rural parents, students, and patients, slowly realize that the state has abandoned them to their own devices and to the forces of nature. Sometimes, where a failed state is effectively split, as in the Sudan, essential services may be provided to the favored half, but not to the half in rebellion and engulfed in war. Most of the time the destroyed nation-state completely underperforms. Literacy rates fall, infant mortality rises, the AIDS epidemic overwhelms any health infrastructure that continues to exist, life expectancies plummet, and an already poor and battered citizenry becomes even poorer and more immiserated.

Failed states offer unparalleled economic opportunity—but only for a privileged few. Those around the ruler or the ruling oligarchy grow richer while

their less fortunate brethren starve. Immense profits are available from an awareness of regulatory advantages and currency speculation and arbitrage. But the privilege of making real money when everything else is deteriorating is confined to clients of the ruling elite or to especially favored external entrepreneurs. The nation-state's responsibility to maximize the well-being and personal prosperity of all of its citizens is conspicuously absent, if it ever existed.

Corruption flourishes in many states, but in failed states it often does so on an unusually destructive scale. There is widespread petty or lubricating corruption as a matter of course, but escalating levels of venal corruption mark failed states: kickbacks on anything that can be put out to fake tender (medical supplies, textbooks, bridges, roads, and tourism concessions); unnecessarily wasteful construction projects arranged so as to maximize the rents that they generate; licenses for existing and nonexistent activities; and persistent and generalized extortion. In such situations, corrupt ruling elites mostly invest their gains overseas, not at home, making the economic failure of their states that much more acute. Or they dip directly into the coffers of the shrinking state to pay for external aggressions, lavish residences and palaces, extensive overseas travel, and privileges and perquisites that feed their greed. Military officers always benefit from these excessively corrupt regimes and imbibe ravenously from the same illicit troughs as civilian officials.

An indicator of failure, but not a cause of failure, are declining real national and per capita levels of annual GDP. The statistical underpinnings of most states in the developing world are shaky, but failed states—even, or particularly, failed states with vast natural resources—exhibit overall worsening GDP figures, slim year-to-year growth rates, and greater disparities of income between the wealthiest and poorest fifths of their populations. High official state deficits (Zimbabwe's reached more than 30 percent of GDP in 2001) fund extravagant security expenditures and the siphoning of cash by friendly elites. Inflation usually soars because rulers raid the central bank and print money. From the resulting economic insecurity, often engineered by rulers so as to maximize their own fortunes and their own political and economic power, there are many rents to be collected by entrepreneurs connected to the prevailing regime. Smuggling becomes rife. When state failure becomes complete, the local currency falls out of favor and one or more international currencies take its place. Money changers are everywhere, legal or not, and arbitrage becomes a steady international pursuit.

Sometimes, especially if there are intervening climatic disasters, the economic chaos and generalized neglect that is endemic to failed states leads to regular food shortages and widespread hunger—indeed, even to episodes of starvation and major efforts of international humanitarian relief. Natural ca-

lamities can overwhelm the resources even of non-failed, but weak, states in the developing world. But when state competencies have consciously been sucked dry by unscrupulous rulers and their cronies, as in failed states, unforeseen natural disasters or man-made wars can drive ignored populations over the edge of endurance into starvation. Once such populations have lost their subsistence plots and their sources of income, they forfeit their homes and their already weak support networks and are forced into an endless cycle of migration and displacement. Failed states provide no safety nets, and the homeless and the destitute become fodder for anyone who can offer food and a cause.

A nation-state also fails when it loses legitimacy—when it forfeits the “mandate of heaven.” Its nominal borders become irrelevant. Groups within the nominal borders seek autonomous control within one or more parts of the national territory, or sometimes even across its international borders. Once the state’s capacity to secure itself or to perform in an expected manner recedes, and once what little capacity remains is devoted almost exclusively to the fortunes of a few or to a favored ethnicity or community, there is every reason to expect less and less loyalty to the state on the part of the excluded and disenfranchised. When the rulers are perceived to be working for themselves and their kin and not for the state, their legitimacy, and the state’s legitimacy, plummets. The state increasingly is conceived as being owned by an exclusive class or group, with all others pushed aside. The social contract that binds inhabitants to an overarching polity becomes breached. Various sets of citizens cease trusting the state. Citizens then naturally turn more and more to the kinds of sectional and community loyalties that are their main recourse in time of insecurity and their main default source of economic opportunity. They transfer their allegiances to clan and group leaders, some of whom become warlords. These warlords or other local strongmen can derive support from external as well as indigenous supporters. In the wilder, more marginalized corners of failed states, terror can breed along with the prevailing anarchy that naturally accompanies state breakdown and failure.

A *collapsed* state is a rare and extreme version of a failed state. Political goods are obtained through private or ad hoc means. Security is equated with the rule of the strong. A collapsed state exhibits a vacuum of authority. It is a mere geographical expression, a black hole into which a failed polity has fallen. There is dark energy, but the forces of entropy have overwhelmed the radiance that hitherto provided some semblance of order and other vital political goods to the inhabitants (no longer the citizens) embraced by language or ethnic affinities or borders. When Somalia failed in the late 1980s, it soon collapsed. Bosnia, Lebanon, and Afghanistan collapsed more than a decade ago, and Nigeria and Sierra Leone collapsed in the 1990s. When those collapses occurred,

substate actors took over, as they always do when the prime polity disappears. Those warlords or substate actors gained control over regions and subregions within what had been a nation-state, built up their own local security apparatuses and mechanisms, sanctioned markets and other trading arrangements, and even established an attenuated form of international relations. By definition illegitimate and unrecognized, warlords can assume the trappings of a new quasi state, such as the internationally unrecognized Somaliland in the old north of Somalia. Despite the parceling out of the collapsed state into warlord fiefdoms, there still is a prevalence of disorder, anomic behavior, and the kinds of anarchic mentality and entrepreneurial endeavors—especially gun and drug trafficking—that are compatible with external networks of terror.

None of these designations is terminal. Lebanon, Nigeria, and Tajikistan recovered from collapse and are now weak. Afghanistan and Sierra Leone graduated from collapsed to failed. Zimbabwe is moving rapidly from being strong toward failure. Although a state like Haiti is termed endemically weak, most categorizations are snapshots. The quality of failed or collapsed is real, but need not be static. Failure is a fluid halting place, with movement forward to weakness and backward into collapse always possible. Certainly, too, because failure and collapse are undesirable results for states, they are neither inevitable nor unavoidable. Whereas weak states fail much more easily than strong ones, that failure is not preordained. Failure is preventable, particularly since human agency rather than structural flaws or institutional insufficiencies are almost invariably at the root of slides from weakness (or strength) toward failure and collapse.

Lebanon's experience is instructive. As Oren Barak suggests, the inability of Lebanon's feuding sectoral leaders to adapt a 1943 power-sharing agreement to altered political and social circumstances brought the divided state to its knees. During the nation's civil war of the mid-1970s, it collapsed. But once a cease-fire had been forged in 1990 and a new political compromise achieved through international mediation and the formal acceptance of Syria as a neighborhood hegemon, Lebanon could be revived as a functioning state, and slowly reconstructed. Without guarantees of human security, and the cooperation of dueling leaders, which Syria compelled, any resuscitation of the post-collapse Lebanese state would have proven impossible.<sup>4</sup>

### **Contemporary State Failure, Collapse, and Weakness**

This decade's failed states are Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Sudan.<sup>5</sup> These seven states exemplify the criteria of failure sketched out above. Somalia is a collapsed state. Together they are

the contemporary classical failed and collapsed states, but others were once collapsed or failed and many other modern nation-states now approach the brink of failure, some much more ominously than others. Another group of states drifts disastrously downward from weak to failing to failed. What is of particular interest is why and how states slip from weakness toward failure, or not. The list of weak states is long, but only a few of those weak and poorly governed states need necessarily edge into failure. Why? Even the categorization of a state as failing—Colombia and Indonesia, among others—need not doom it irretrievably to full failure. What does it take to drive a failing state over the edge into failure or collapse? Why did Somalia not stop at failure rather than collapsing?

These questions are answered in the country chapters that follow this opening essay. Because separate discussions of five failed and collapsed states are followed by examinations of seven weak states, two of which were once collapsed states, there is a wealth of empirical material on which to discriminate between the several categories of statehood in the developing world. Of the failed and collapsed cases, not each one fully fills all of the cells of the matrix of nation-state failure. However, to qualify for failure a state needs to demonstrate that it has met most of the explicit criteria. How truly minimal are the roads, the schools, and the hospitals and clinics? How far have GDP and other economic indicators fallen? How far does the ambit of the central government reach? Has the state lost legitimacy? Most important, because civil conflict is decisive for state failure, can the state in question still secure its borders and guarantee security to its citizens, urban and rural?

Walter Clarke and Robert Gosende ask how Somalia, a nation-state of about 9 million people with a strongly cohesive cultural tradition, a common language, a common religion, and a shared history of nationalism could fail, and then collapse. Perhaps, they say, it never constituted a single coherent territory, having been part of the colonial empires of two suzerains, with other Somalis living outside the boundaries of the two colonies. Then, as was often the experience elsewhere in Africa and Asia, the first elected, proto-democratic, post-independence civilian governments proved to be “experimental, inefficient, corrupt, and incapable of creating any kind of national political culture.”<sup>6</sup> General Mohammed Siad Barre, commander of the army, decided that the politicians were ruining the country, so he usurped power in 1969, suspending the constitution, banning political parties, and promising an end to corruption. Twenty years and many misadventures later, Siad Barre had succeeded in destroying any semblance of national governmental legitimacy. Backed first by the Soviet Union and then by the United States, Siad Barre destroyed institutions of government and democracy, abused his citizens’ human rights, chan-

neled as many of the resources of the state as possible into his own and his subclan's hands, and deprived everyone else at the end of the Cold War of what was left of the spoils of Somali supreme rule. All of the major clans and subclans, other than Siad Barre's own, became alienated. His shock troops perpetrated one outrage after another against fellow Somalis. By the onset of civil war in 1991, the Somali state had long since failed. The civil war destroyed what was left, and Somalia collapsed onto itself.

The chapters on three failed states offer further exemplifications of the Somali theme. In each, a series of fateful decisions by rulers and ruling cadres eviscerated the capabilities of the state, separated the government from its subjects, created opposition movements and civil warfare, and ultimately ended the Potemkin pretense of international stature. William Reno shows how President Stevens (1968–1985) systematically reduced human security within Sierra Leone so as to maximize his own personal power, and how that increase in personal power permitted a quantum leap in his control over the country's rents and riches. Stevens "sold chances to profit from disorder to those who could pay for it through providing services."<sup>7</sup> He created a private military force to terrorize his own people and to aggrandize, especially in the diamond fields. As the official rule of law receded, the law of the jungle, presided over by Stevens, took its place. Institutions of government were broken or corrupted. The state became illegitimate, and a civil war over spoils, encouraged and assisted from outside, turned failure into a collapse. In 2002, after hideous atrocities, a brutal intervention by a West African peace enforcement contingent, much more war, and the arrival of British paratroopers and a large UN peacekeeping force, Sierra Leone recovered sufficiently to be considered failed rather than collapsed. It even held effective elections.

Mobutu used analogous tactics in the patrimony of Zaire. As his people's self-proclaimed *guide*, or as the personalist embodiment of national leadership during the Cold War, he deployed the largesse of his American and other Western patrons to enhance his personal wealth, to heighten his stature over his countrymen, and to weave a tightly manipulated web of loyalties across the army and into all aspects of Zairese society. Every proper political and democratic institution was an obstacle to the edifice that he created. So was civil society, politics itself in the broad sense, and economic development. Letting the country's Belgian-built infrastructure rot, maintaining a colonial type of resource extraction (of copper, other metals, and diamonds), rebuffing the rise of a real bourgeoisie, and feeding his people false glories instead of real substance and per capita growth accentuated his own power, wealth, and importance. As with Stevens and Siad Barre, the modernizing state was the enemy.

Mobutu had no sense of noblesse oblige. René Lemarchand says that for Mobutu's state, patronage was the indispensable lubricant. Ultimately, however, "the lubricant ran out and the Mobutist machine was brought to a . . . standstill. . . . The inability of the Mobutist state to generate a volume of rewards consistent with its clientelistic ambitions is the key . . . [to] . . . its rapid loss of legitimacy."<sup>8</sup>

The warring divisions of the failed Sudanese state, north and south, reflect fundamental ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences; Egyptian and British conquest and colonial administrative flaws and patterns; post-independence disparities and discriminations (the north dominating the south); and the discovery of oil in the south. A weak state in the north, providing political goods at minimal levels for its mostly Muslim constituents, became the nucleus of a truly failed state when its long war with the south (from 1955 to 1972 and from 1983 through 2002) entered the equation. The Sudanese war has the dubious distinction of having inflicted the largest number of civilian casualties (over 2 million) in any intrastate war, coupled with the largest internally displaced and refugee population in the world (about 4 million). Slavery (north against south) flourishes, as well. Moreover, in the south, the central government's writ rarely runs. It provides no political goods to its southern citizens, bombs them, raids them, and regards black southerners as enemy. As a result, the Sudan has long been failed. Yet, northerners still regard their state as legitimate, even though the southern insurgents do not and have sought either secession or autonomy for decades. As Gérard Prunier and Rachel Gisselquist suggest, however, so long as oil revenues shore up the north, the Sudan is unlikely to collapse entirely.<sup>9</sup> They also suggest that contemporary peace processes are unsustainable.

The paradigm of failure so well explored in the Somali, Sierra Leonean, Congolese, and Sudanese chapters holds equally well, with similar but differently detailed material, in Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, and Liberia. (Reno's chapter contains material on Liberia.) Indeed, Angola's killing fields and internally displaced circumstances are almost as intense and certainly as destructive as the Sudan's. The wars in Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, and Liberia have been equally traumatic for ordinary combatants and hapless civilians unwittingly caught up in a vicious and (until 2002 in Angola) interminable battle for resources and power between determined opponents. Burundi's majority-minority war has produced fewer deaths in recent decades, but it continues an enduring contest for primacy that antedates the modern nation-state itself. From birth economically weak and geographically limited, Burundi's capacity to perform has for a decade been fatally crippled by majority-backed insurgencies against autocratic minority-led governments.

### **Weakness and the Possibility of Failure**

Collapsed and failed designate the consequences of a process of decay at the nation-state level. The capacity of those nation-states to perform positively for their citizens has atrophied. But, as the Lebanese and Tajikistani cases show, that atrophy is neither inevitable nor the result of happenstance. For a state to fail is not that easy. Crossing from weakness into failure takes will as well as neglect. Thus, weak nation-states need not tip into failure. Which ones do and which ones do not is the focus of the third section of this book.

There are several interesting cases that indeed test the precision of the distinction between weakness and failure:

Sri Lanka has been embroiled in a bitter and destructive civil war for nineteen years. As much as 15 percent of its total land mass has at times in the last decade been controlled by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eealam (LTTE), a Tamil separatist insurgency. Additionally, the LTTE with relative impunity has been able to assassinate prime ministers, bomb presidents, kill off rival Tamils, and in 2001, even destroy the nation's civil air terminal and main air force base. But, as incapable as the Sinhala-dominated governments of the island have been of putting down the LTTE rebellion, so the nation-state has remained merely weak (or fragmented, as Jenne's chapter posits), never close to tipping over into failure. For 80 percent of Sri Lankans, the government performs reasonably well. The roads are maintained and schools and hospitals function, to some limited extent even in the war-torn north and east. Since the early 1990s, too, Sri Lanka has exhibited robust levels of economic growth. The authority of successive governments extends securely to the Sinhala-speaking 80 percent of the country, and into the recaptured Tamil areas. For these reasons, despite a consuming internal conflict founded on intense majority-minority discrimination and deprivation and on pronounced ethnic and religious differences, Sri Lanka projects authority throughout much of the country, has suffered no loss of legitimacy among Sinhala, and has successfully escaped failure.

Indonesia is another case of weakness avoiding failure despite widespread insecurity. As the world's largest Muslim nation, its far-flung archipelago harbors separatist wars in Aceh in the west and in Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) in the east, plus large pockets of Muslim-Christian conflict in Ambon and the Maluku islands, Muslim-Christian hostility in northern Sulawesi, and ethnic xenophobic outbursts in Kalimantan. Given all of these conflictual situations, none of which has become less bitter since the end of the Soeharto dictatorship, it would be easy to conclude that Indonesia was approaching failure. Yet, as Michael Malley's chapter argues forcefully, only the insurgents in Aceh and

Papua want to secede and are contesting the state. The several other battles take place within the state, not against it. They do not threaten the integrity and resources of the state in the way that the enduring, but low-level, war in Aceh does. In Aceh and Papua, the government retains the upper hand. Overall, most of Indonesia is still secure. In most of the country the government projects power and authority. It manages to provide most other necessary political goods to most of Indonesia despite dangerous economic and other developments in the post-Soeharto era.

What about Colombia? An otherwise well-endowed, prosperous, and ostensibly stable state controls only two-thirds of its territory, a clear hint of failure. Three private armies project their own power across large zones carved out of the very body of the state. The official defense and political establishment has renounced or lost authority in those zones to insurgent groups and drug traffickers. Moreover, Colombia is tense and disturbed. It boasts the second highest annual per capita murder rate in the world. Its politicians and businessmen routinely wear armored vests and travel with well-armed guards, a clear indicator of the state's inability to ensure personal security. Even so, as Harvey Kline's chapter argues, the rest of Colombia as a state still delivers schooling and medical care, organizes a physical and communications infrastructure, provides economic opportunity, and remains legitimate. Colombia is weak because of its multiple insurgencies, but is comparatively strong and well-performing in the areas over which it maintains control. When and if the government of Colombia can re-insert itself into the disputed zones and further reduce the power of drug traffickers, the state's reach will expand. Then, a weak, endangered state will be able to move farther away from possible failure toward strength.

Zimbabwe is an example of a once unquestionably strong African state that has fallen rapidly through weakness to the very edge of the abyss of failure. All Zimbabwe lacks in order to join the ranks of failed states is a widespread internal insurgent movement directed against the government. That could come, particularly if the political and economic deterioration of the country continues unchecked. In 2000 and 2001, GDP per capita slid backward by 10 percent a year. Inflation galloped from 30 percent to 116 percent. The local currency fell against the U.S. dollar from 38:1 to 500:1. Foreign and domestic investment ceased. Unemployment rose to 60 percent in a country of 12 million. Health and educational services vanished. HIV infection rates climbed to 30 percent, with about 2000 Zimbabweans dying every week. Respect for the rule of law was badly battered and then subverted. Political institutions ceased to function fully. Agents of the state preyed on its real and its supposed opponents, chilling free expression and shamelessly stealing a presidential election. The government's legitimacy vanished. Corruption, meanwhile, flourished, with

the ruling elite pocketing their local and Congolese war gains and letting most Zimbabweans go hungry. Real starvation appeared in mid-2002, despite food aid from abroad. All of this misery, and the tendency to fail, resulted (as it had earlier in the Congo and Sierra Leone) from the ruthless designs and vengeance of an omnipotent ruler.

Indonesia, Colombia, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe are but four among a large number of early twenty-first century nation-states at risk of failing. They each escape the category failed, but only for the time being, and only if they each manage to arrest their descent toward economic and political failure, accommodate their insurgency or insurgencies, and strengthen their delivery of political goods to all, or almost all, of their citizens. Tajikistan, examined in Nasrin Dadmehr's chapter, is a fifth state that harbors the possibility of failure, in this case, renewed failure. From 1992 to 1997, the government of Tajikistan projected power only in selected parts of the ramshackle nation; across vast areas, there was no government, war raged, and "the state lost its meaning."<sup>10</sup> Then Russia exerted itself in its former colony, claiming that its own security remained at risk because of lawlessness there. From 1999, Russia reinforced its major base in Tajikistan and increasingly became a force for stability against internal dissidence, as well as a buffer for the Tajikistan government against Taliban- and Uzbek-inspired adventurism. In this century, Russia has become the guarantor of Tajikistan's integrity.

A number of other nation-states belong in the category of weak states that show a high potential to fail. Nepal has been a clear case since its Maoist insurgency began again roiling the mountains and plains of the monarchist country. Already hindered by geography and poverty, Nepal has never been a robust provider of political goods to its inhabitants. The palace massacre of 2001 undermined the legitimacy of the monarchy, and thus of the ruling government. With the flare-up of a determined rural rebellion in 2002, and Nepal's demonstrated inability to cope effectively, security of persons and of regions became harder and harder to achieve, absent military assistance from India. Under these circumstances, Nepal can hardly project power or credibility. Failure becomes a distinct possibility.

So the potential for failure exists in those highly regimented states, such as Iraq and North Korea, that could implode as soon as a dictator or a dictatorial regime is toppled. Because, as Jenne suggests, such states are held together entirely by repression and not by performance, an end to or an easing of repression could create destabilizing battles for succession, resulting anarchy, and the rapid rise of non-state actors. In nation-states made secure by punishment and secret intelligence networks, legitimacy is likely to vanish whenever the curtain of control lifts.

Kyrgyzstan, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Nigeria all fit near Nepal on the continuum of weakness tending toward failure. Kyrgyzstan, with limited resources and arbitrary rule, has contended with a sharply contracted economy, poverty, and two forms of militant insurgency. Those militant rivals for power remain, respect for human rights and democratic processes has slipped, and Kyrgyzstan's ability to emerge from inherited weakness is questionable, even given the creation of a U.S. airbase and the arrival of free-spending Americans. Kenya is about to come to the alleged end of twenty-five years of single-man rule. Although Kenya is intrinsically wealthy, its fortunes have been badly managed, corruption is rampant, and a gang of ethnically specific thugs has distorted the rule of law, limited the supply of political goods, battered civil society and human rights, and privileged related ethnic minorities against larger, more central, but now marginalized ethnicities. Battles royal for spoils in the post-Moi era could lead to clashes between ethnic groups. A righting of scores could readily plunge Kenya into failure.

Nigeria is a democracy under President Olusegun Obasanjo, but the historic rivalries between east and west, south and north, oil-states and non-oil provinces, Christian and Muslim communities, democrats and autocrats, and soldiers and citizens that have bedeviled Africa's most populous state since independence in 1960 (and before) are still there, seething below a surface calmed or smoothed by the presence of Obasanjo. Military dictators could reemerge, intercommunal conflict could readily reoccur, and the north-south divide could once again become an obstacle to strengthening a state already softened by economic confusion, continued corruption, and mismanagement. Nigeria also performs poorly as a state, and provides political goods adequately at best across the vast *mélange* of poor and rich provinces that make up its little-unified and very unglued whole. Competition during the national election in 2003 could readily loosen the already tattered ties that keep Nigeria whole.

Other weak states that contain the incubus of failure because of serious intercommunal antagonisms but have managed effectively to come to terms with or to bridge their divisions include Fiji, as described fully in Stephanie Lawson's chapter; New Guinea; the Solomon Islands; Lebanon, as discussed in Barak's chapter; the Philippines; Bolivia; Ecuador; and Paraguay.

Lebanon had disintegrated almost entirely before Syria's intervention enabled the geographical expression that Lebanon had always represented to become a state once again, and to begin to function internally and internationally. Syria gave a sense of governmental legitimacy to what had been a bombed out shell of a polity. Lebanon today qualifies as weak rather than failed, because its state is credible, civil war is absent, and political goods are being provided in significant quantities and quality. Syria provides the security blanket, denies

fractious warlords the freedom to aggrandize, and mandates cooperation between the usually antagonistic Muslim and Christian communities and between the battling groups within the Muslim community. The fear of being attacked preemptively by rivals, or losing control of critical resources, is alleviated by Syria's imposed hegemony. Within that framework of supplied security, Lebanon's traditional entrepreneurial spirit has transformed a failed state into a much stronger one.

Unlike many of the weak states discussed herein, Fiji is palpably a strong state. Yet it has become weak, being acutely "vulnerable to more serious failure in terms of its capacity to provide a secure social, political, and economic environment" for its two main antagonistic constituent peoples. Despite seventeen years of relatively stable post-colonial rule, Fiji experienced two coups in 1987 and another in 2000. Fiji, once considered a bastion of the rule of law in the Pacific, became a state with worrying centrifugal tendencies. Its weakness stemmed from ethnic rivalries, and the realization that democratic politics and constitutional processes were insufficient to bridge existing cleavages. Conflict and coups were propelled by unresolved fears among ethnic elites. Until those fears can be reduced, Fiji remains weak as a state and potentially prone (like the Solomon Islands) to renewed challenges to the state's authority and legitimacy.<sup>11</sup>

A third variety of weak state includes the enduringly weak. As the chapter by Marlye G lin-Adams and David Malone suggests, Haiti has always been on the edge of failure, particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But its entrenched weaknesses include no ethnic, religious, or other communal cleavages. There are no insurgent movements. Nor has Haiti experienced radical or rapid deflation in standards of living and national expectations, like Argentina in 2002 and Russia in the 1990s. Haiti has always been the poorest polity in the Western hemisphere.

Haiti's national capacity to provide political goods has always been compromised by autocratic and corrupt leadership, weak institutions, an intimidated civil society, high levels of crime, low GDP levels per capita, high rates of infant mortality, suspicion or outright hostility from its neighbors, and many other deficiencies. Narcotics trafficking has been a serious problem since the 1980s. The Haitian government has been unable or unwilling to interdict smugglers in general, and drugs transshippers in particular. Haiti, even under President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (1990–1991, 1994–1995, 2000–), is gripped in a vise of weakness. Yet, given very limited organized internal dissidence, almost no internal ethnic, religious, or linguistic cleavages within Haitian society except a deep distrust by the majority of the upper classes, and of mulattos because of their historic class affiliations, the ingredients of major civil strife are

absent. Failure demands communal differences capable of being transformed into consuming cross-group violence. Haiti seems condemned to remain weak, but without failing.

Nation-states that, given their geographical and physical legacy (and future peril, in several cases, because of global warming and cataclysmic climatic change), can be considered inherently weak include (not a full list) Burkina Faso, Chad, Ghana, Guinea, and Niger, in Africa; Georgia and Moldova in the former Soviet Union, and Cambodia, East Timor, and Laos in Asia.<sup>12</sup> Each has its own distinguishing features, and Georgia and Moldova battle their own so far successful separatist movements. Chad at one time harbored a vicious civil war, and Burkina Faso, Niger, Cambodia, and Laos are all ruled by autocrats unfriendly to civil society and to participatory governance. East Timor is a very new state, having been rescued and resuscitated by the United Nations after two bitter and unrewarding colonial interludes and a brutal final Indonesian spree of destruction and death. East Timor, even with UN help, enters its full majority without a cadre of experienced professionals and bureaucrats and without much in the way of physical resources. The willingness of these weak states to provide political goods in quantity and quality is severely limited at the best of times. Almost any external shock or internal emergency could push them over the brink.

### **Indicators of Failure**

As this chapter has suggested earlier, the road to nation-state failure is littered with serious mistakes of omission and commission. Even in the modern states with inherited weaknesses, failure is not preordained. Poor, arbitrary, absent-minded creations predisposed to failure need not fail. Indeed, Botswana, dirt poor at independence and a forlorn excuse for a state, under determined and visionary leadership created a state strong enough to take full advantage of a subsequent, and much unexpected, resource bonanza. Similarly, a sugar monoculture like Mauritius was transformed by determined visionary leadership into a thriving plural society based on manufacturing for export. In contrast, Malawi and Mali (two examples among many) remain weak and very poor, albeit democratic, having both been unable, in their different circumstances, to overcome the arbitrary configuration of their borders, a common absence of easily exploitable resources, geographical hindrances, and decades of despotism. Climatic change may hit both Malawi and Mali particularly hard, too.

Nation-states are blessed or cursed by the discovery or absence of natural resources, like oil or diamonds, within received borders. But it is not the accidental quality of their borders that is the original flaw; it is what has been made

of the challenges and opportunities of a given outline that determines whether a state remains weak, becomes stronger, or slides toward failure and collapse. The colonial errors were many, especially the freeing of Africa south of the Sahara as forty-eight administrative territories instead of six or seven larger ones, and the abysmal failure to transfer the reins of authority much earlier and much more thoroughly to an indigenat. But it is not possible to predict this century's candidates for failure solely or even largely on the basis of colonial mistreatment.

Nor is it possible successfully to deploy the results of massive surveys of conflict and state collapse to predict failure. Esty et al. analyzed ethnic war leading to collapse, including 12 full collapses in 40 years and 243 "partial" state failures, conflicts, and crises between 1955 and 1994, but only in states larger than 0.5 million.<sup>13</sup> They called state failure and collapse "new labels for a type of severe political crisis exemplified by events of the early 1990s in Somalia, Bosnia, Liberia, and Afghanistan. In these instances the institutions of the central state were so weakened that they could no longer maintain authority or political order beyond the capital city. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Three strong indicators emerged from their work (of seventy-five highly relevant variables): failure was likely when a nation-state favored a closed economic system—when openness to international trade was low or nonexistent; when infant mortality rates (a proxy measure for a society's quality of life) were high, that is, when the ratio of infant deaths per 1,000 live births rose above the international median; and when a nation-state was undemocratic, for lack of democracy feeds on itself. Esty et al. also concluded that GDP per capita levels were almost as robust an indicator of failure as infant mortality levels.

Unhappily, even though it is not implausible that high infant mortality rates are "associated with risk of state failure," for practical predictive purposes rises in infant mortality lag too far behind political and economic changes that, by themselves, are reasonable indicators of a propensity to fail. Likewise, as Esty et al. admit, infant mortality was a better indicator for democracies prone to failure than it was for less democratic cases—as this book shows, the more pressing category of states likely to fail. Closed economic systems, as in the extreme case of Burma after 1968, also predispose to failure; however, rapid falls in GDP per capita, purchasing power, domestic investment rates, and the like are surer and more readily apparent results and indicators of the possibility of failure. Esty et al. also report that trade openness works better for the less democratic regimes. As for the democracy indicator, Esty et al.'s findings are mostly tautological: a downward spiral of democracy obviously tends toward failure and, as they write, "partial democracies [especially in Africa] are indeed far more vulnerable to state failure-type crises than are either full democracies

or autocracies.”<sup>15</sup> The findings of this book dispute the very last point, but that difference may arise because the Esty et al. definition of failure is much narrower (being confined to wars, adverse regime transitions, genocides, and politicides) than the one used in this book. Furthermore, it is because democratic states respond to popular discontent and accommodate dissident political challenges while maintaining normative and institutional inhibitions against massive human rights violations that they fail to fail. Failing and failed states do not respond or accommodate effectively. That is what failure is about.

Three kinds of signals of impending failure—economic, political, and deaths in combat—provide clearer, more timely, and more actionable warnings. On the economic front, Indonesia in 1997–1999, Nigeria in 1993–1999, Lebanon in 1972–1979, and Zimbabwe in 2001–2002, each provide instances of how rapid reductions in incomes and living standards indicated the possibility of failure early enough to be noted and for preventive measures to have been attempted. Once the downward spiral starts in earnest, only a concerted, determined effort can slow its momentum; corrupt autocrats and their equally corrupt associates usually have few incentives to arrest their state’s slide, since they find clever ways to benefit from impoverishment and misery. As foreign and domestic investment dries up, jobs vanish, and per capita incomes fall, the mass of citizens in an imperiled state see their health, educational, and logistical entitlements melt away. Food and fuel shortages occur. Privation and hunger follow, especially if a climatic catastrophe intervenes. Thanks to foreign exchange scarcities, there is less and less of everything that matters. Meanwhile, in the typical failing state, ruling families and cadres arrogate to themselves increasing portions of the available pie. They systematically skim the state treasury, take advantage of official versus street costs of foreign exchange, partake of smuggling and the rents of smuggling, and gather what little is available into their own sticky palms. If it were possible reliably to calibrate the flow of illicit funds into overseas accounts, nation by nation, robust early warnings would be available. Absent detailed reports of such theft, the descriptors in this paragraph become very suggestive indicators that can be watched, in real time, and can forecast serious trouble, if not an end state of failure.

Politically, the available indicators are equally clear, if somewhat less quantifiably precise. A leader and his associates begin by subverting democratic norms, greatly restricting participatory processes, and coercing a legislature and the bureaucracy into subservience. They end judicial independence, block civil society, and suborn the security forces. Political goods become scarce or are supplied to the leading class only. The rulers demonstrate more and more contempt for their peoples, surround themselves with family, clan, or ethnic allies, and distance themselves from their subjects. The state becomes equated

in the eyes of most citizens with the particular drives and desires of a leader and a smallish group. Many of these leaders drive grandly down their boulevards in motorcades, commandeer commercial aircraft for foreign excursions, and put their faces prominently on the local currency, on airports and ships, and on oversized photographs in public places.

The third indicator is the level of violence. If it rises precipitously because of skirmishes, hostilities, or outright civil war, the state can be considered crumbling. As national human security rates fall, the probability of failure rises. Not every civil conflict precipitates failure, but each offers a warning sign. Absolute or relative crime rates and civilian combat death counts above a certain number cannot prescribe failure. But they show that a society is deteriorating and that the glue that binds a new (or an old) state together is becoming fatally thin.

No single indicator provides certain evidence that a strong state is becoming weak or a weak state is heading pell-mell into failure. But a judicious assessment of the several available indicators discussed in this section, taken together, should provide both quantifiable and qualitative warnings. Then avoidance maneuvers can occur and efforts at prevention can be mounted.

That said, research on failed states is insufficiently advanced for precise tipping points to be provided. It is not yet correct to suggest that if GDP falls by X amount in a single year, rulers dismiss judges or abuse the human rights of their subjects by X, soldiers take a state house, or civilian death rates rise more than X per year, the state in question will tip for sure from weak to failing to failed. All we know is that all of those actions suggest that all is not well in the depths of Ruritania, misery is spreading, and the future shape and fate of the state is at serious risk.

### **The Hand of Man**

State failure is largely man made, not accidental. Institutional fragilities and structural flaws contribute to failure, but those deficiencies usually hark back to decisions or actions of men (rarely women). So it is that leadership errors across history have destroyed states for personal gain; in the contemporary era, leadership mistakes continue to erode fragile polities in Africa, Asia, and Oceania that already operate on the cusp of failure. Mobutu's kleptocratic rule extracted the marrow of Zaire and left nothing for the mass of his national dependents. Much of the resource wealth of that vast country ended up in his or his cronies' pockets; over four decades, hardly any wealth was devoted to uplifting the Congolese people, improving their welfare, building infrastructures, or even providing more than rudimentary amounts of human security. Mobutu's gov-

ernment performed only for Mobutu, as Lemarchand's chapter so thoroughly documents, not for Zaire.

Likewise, oil-rich Angola remains failed following three decades of war and, within the territory now fully controlled by the government of President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, also because he and his associates have long refused to deliver more than limited political goods to their fellow countrymen.<sup>16</sup> President Stevens decapitated the Sierra Leonean state in order to strengthen his own power amid growing chaos. Sierra Leone, as Reno's chapter describes, has not yet recovered from Stevens's depredations. Nor has Liberia been resuscitated in the aftermath of the slashing neglect and unabashed greed of Samuel Doe, Prince Johnson, and Charles Taylor, which Reno also discusses. In Somalia, as Clarke and Gosende show, Siad Barre arrogated more and more power and privilege to himself and his clan. Finally, there was none left for other pretenders to power and its rewards. The Somali state had been gutted willfully, the abilities of the Somali government to provide political goods endlessly compromised, and the fall into failure and then into full collapse followed inexorably.

President Robert Gabriel Mugabe personally led Zimbabwe from strength to the precipice of failure, his high-handed and seriously corrupt rule having bled the resources of the state into his own pockets, squandered foreign exchange, discouraged domestic and international investment, subverted the courts, and driven his country to the very brink of starvation. In Sri Lanka, Solomon and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, one after the other, drove the LTTE into reactive combat by abrogating minority rights and vitiating the social contract on which the country had been created as Ceylon. In Afghanistan, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burrehan ul-din Rabani tried to prevent Afghans other than their own Pashtun and Tajik fellow nationals from sharing the perquisites of governance; their narrowly focused, self-enriching decisions enabled the Taliban to follow them in triumph and Afghanistan to descend into all-out terror.

Wherever there has been state failure or collapse, human agency has engineered the slide from strength or weakness and willfully presided over profound and destabilizing resource shifts from the state to the ruling few. As those resource transfers accelerated and human rights abuses mounted, countervailing violence signified the extent to which states in question had broken fundamental social contracts and become hollow receptacles of personalist privilege, personalist rule, and national impoverishment. Inhabitants of failed states understand what it means for life to be brutish and short.

In earlier, less interconnected eras, state weakness and failure could be isolated and kept distant from the developed world. Failure once held fewer implications for the surrounding regions and for the peace and security of the globe.

Now, however, as much as their citizens suffer, the failings of states also pose enormous dangers beyond their own borders. Preventing nation-states from failing, and resuscitating those that have failed and will fail, have thus become the critical, all-consuming, strategic and moral imperatives of our terrorized time. The chapters in this book demonstrate how and why states have failed and will fail, and how weak states have in several cases been spared the descent into despair and destruction.

### Notes

1. This book and this opening chapter emerged from a five-year project of the World Peace Foundation and Harvard University's Program on Intrastate Conflict on all aspects of state failure. More than forty collaborators, including all of the contributors to this volume, were involved in formulating the direction of the research and in reviewing the conclusions presented in this chapter and in the individual chapters that follow. A companion volume, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, will also appear in 2003. The present chapter draws on concepts developed in my articles "The New Nature of Nation-State Failure," *Washington Quarterly*, XXV (2002), 85–96, and "Failed States in a World of Terror," *Foreign Affairs*, LXXXI (2002), 1–13. With respect particularly to this chapter, I am very appreciative of the helpful and unstinting advice and ideas of Michael Ignatieff, Nelson Kasfir, and Susan Rose-Ackerman.

2. For political goods, see J. Roland Pennock, "Political Development, Political Systems, and Political Goods," *World Politics*, XVIII (1966), 420–426, 433.

3. Some of these points were earlier made by I. William Zartman, "Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse," in idem (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder, 1995), 3. Zartman's overall definition, "Collapse means that the basic functions of the state are no longer performed, as analyzed in various theories of the state" (5), parallels what has been suggested here. This book, however, parses *failed* and *collapsed*, distinguishing them. It also details the "functions," suggesting which ones are critical. The Failed States project at Purdue University defines failed states "by the patterns of governmental collapse within a nation which often bring demands (because of the refugees they foster, the human rights they abridge and their inability to forestall starvation and disease) which threaten the security of their surrounding states and region." The Purdue definition appears much less specific than the one employed herein. For the Failed States website at Purdue University, see [www.ippu.purdue.edu/failed\\_states](http://www.ippu.purdue.edu/failed_states). Earlier, Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, "Saving Failed States," *Foreign Policy*, LXXXIX (winter 1992–93), 3, defined failed nation-states as entities "utterly incapable of sustaining" themselves as members of the international community. Civil strife, government breakdown, and economic privation were proximate causes of state failure.

4. Oren Barak, "Lebanon: Failure, Collapse, and Resuscitation," chapter 12 in this volume, 305–339.

5. In 1995, Jennifer Widner suggested that the same states, plus Chad, Togo, and Congo-Brazzaville, had experienced “the collapse of political order” and authority had “disintegrated completely into civil war.” Widner, “State and Statelessness in Late Twentieth-Century Africa,” *Daedalus*, CXXIV (1995), 136–137.

6. Walter Clarke and Robert Gosende, “Somalia: Can a Collapsed State Reconstitute Itself,” chapter 5 in this volume, 129–158.

7. William Reno, “Sierra Leone: Warfare in a Post-State Society,” chapter 3 in this volume, 75.

8. René Lemarchand, “The Democratic Republic of the Congo: From Failure to Potential Reconstruction,” chapter 2 in this volume, 37.

9. Gérard Prunier and Rachel Gisselquist, “The Sudan: A Successfully Failed State,” chapter 4 in this volume, 101–127.

10. Nasrin Dadmehr, “Tajikistan: Regionalism and Weakness,” chapter 9 in this volume, 245.

11. Stephanie Lawson, “Fiji: Divided and Weak,” chapter 10 in this volume, 265–288.

12. Timothy Docking, “Responding to War and State Collapse in West Africa” (21 January 2002), a United States Institute of Peace Special Report, calls Guinea a collapsed state.

13. Daniel C. Esty, Jack A. Goldstone, Ted Robert Gurr, Barbara Harff, Marc Levy, Geoffrey D. Dabelko, Pamela T. Surko, and Alan N. Unger, “State Failure Task Force Report: Phase II Findings” (31 July 1998). Earlier, most of the same authors produced “Working Papers: State Failure Task Force Report” (30 November 1995). The Esty et al. definition of failure in both versions of the report is much narrower than the definition used in this book.

14. Daniel C. Esty et al., “The State Failure Project: Early Warning Research for U.S. Foreign Policy Planning,” paper on the Failed States website, Purdue University (West Lafayette, February 25–27, 1998).

15. Esty et al., “State Failure Task Force Report” (1998), 9.

16. IMF report on Angola, cited in Justin Pearce, “IMF: Angola’s ‘Missing Millions,’” BBC News (18 October 2002), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/africa/2338669.stm>; Global Witness report, “All the President’s Men” (2002), cited in “West ‘Creates’ Conditions for Corruption,” BBC News (25 March 2002), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/1892790.stm>; “The Oil Diagnostic in Angola: An Update,” Human Rights Watch (March 2001), [www.hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/angola/index.htm](http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/angola/index.htm).



Filed Under Collapsed States, State Failure, State Weakness. A failed state is a country with a government that cannot or will not deliver essential political goods (public services) to its citizens. The state, usually not yet a nation-state, may hold a seat in the United Nations and function as a sovereign entity in regional and world politics, but as far as most of its people are concerned, the state fails them by its inability to perform state functions adequately. After the strong states come those that are weak according to the criteria set out below. At any time, there are as many as eighty or ninety weak states: some almost strong and some, at the very bottom of the weak listing, tending toward failure and capable of becoming a subtype called "failing." Failed state, a state that is unable to perform the two fundamental functions of the sovereign nation-state in the modern world system: it cannot project authority over its territory and peoples, and it cannot protect its national boundaries. The governing capacity of a failed state is attenuated. State failure comes in degrees and is often a function of both the collapse of state institutions and societal collapse. Weak states were failing with increasing frequency, most of them in Africa but also a handful in Asia and the Middle East, and failed states are known to be hospitable to and to harbour dangerous nonstate actors such as warlords and groups that commit terrorist acts.