

## **WEAK AND FAILING STATES: CRITICAL NEW SECURITY ISSUES**

*This essay defines the nature of state failure and explains the differences between strong, weak, failing, failed, and collapsed states. The author argues that failing states are a particular worry to the security of the twenty-first century. The role of the European Union and NATO in approaching the issue of failed states, and the deficiencies of EU and NATO policy are noted. Methods of preventing state failure are discussed, along with indicators that provide early warning for failure.*

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Nation-states fail because they no longer deliver positive political goods to their people. Their governments lose legitimacy and, in the eyes and hearts of a growing plurality of its citizens, the nation-state itself becomes illegitimate. These kinds of states – failed states and collapsed states (an extreme form) – are proliferating in number and posing larger and larger challenges to world order. They constitute security threats because of the disorder and non-state actors which they harbor. They threaten a region's and the world's security as they create potential reservoirs for terror movements and terrorists.

### *The Nature of State Weakness, Failure, and Collapse*

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 a state.<sup>1</sup>

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

The civil wars which characterize failed states usually stem from or have roots in ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal enmity. The fear of the other (and the consequent security dilemma) 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, pools of resource wealth such as petroleum deposits, diamond fields, other minerals, or forests that can be quickly denuded.<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> The definitions and analysis in this paper follows that contained in Robert I. Rotberg, "The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair," in Rotberg (ed.) *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), pp. 1-45. For an instructive discussion of "insurgency"—"a technology of military conflict characterized by small, lightly-armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas"—see James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," pp. 7-12, unpublished paper presented at the 2001 APSA meeting.

<sup>2</sup> Fearon and Laitin (2001), p. 24, criticize the conclusions of Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler regarding greed driving civil war, "On the Economic Causes of War," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 50 (1998), pp. 563-73.

build nations from a congeries of groups of diverse backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Nor should it be ascribed baldly to the oppression of minorities by a majority, although such brutalities are often a major ingredient of the recipe which leads to failure.

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 sub-set 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' 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, and becomes a *failing* state, when this kind of ruler-led oppression provokes a countervailing reaction on the part of resentful groups or newly emerged rebels.

In contrast to strong states, failed states cannot control their peripheral regions, especially those regions occupied by out-groups. They lose authority over large sections of territory. Often, the expression of official power is limited to a capital city and to one or more ethnically-specific zones. Plausibly, the extent of a state's failure can be measured by the extent of its geographical expanse 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>4</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 arm themselves, threaten the residents of central cities, and overwhelm demoralized government contingents, as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, Indonesia, Liberia, Nepal, Sierra Leone, and the Solomon Islands.

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, lawlessness becomes more apparent. Criminal gangs take over the streets of the cities. Arms and drug trafficking

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<sup>3</sup> Fearon and Laitin (2001) pp. 3-6.

<sup>4</sup> Some of these points were made earlier by I. William Zartman, "Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse," in I. William Zartman (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), p. 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," (p. 5) parallels what has been suggested here. The present article, however, distinguishes between *failed* and *collapsed* states. It also details the "functions," suggesting which ones are critical.

The Failed States project at Purdue University defined 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*, 89, (Winter 1992-93), p. 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. Their definition puts the onus on reputation rather than performance.

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. More and more they forfeit their role as the preferred suppliers of political goods to upstart warlords and other non-state actors. A failed state is a polity that is no longer able or willing to perform the fundamental tasks 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 ratify decisions of the executives. Democratic debate is noticeably absent. The judiciary is derivative of the executive rather than being independent, and citizens know that they cannot 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) there, the more failure a state will exemplify. As rulers siphon funds from state coffers, so fewer capital resources remain 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 is typically neglected. Where the state still controls such communications backbones as a landline 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 repairs and service. If private entrepreneurs have been permitted by the state monopoly to erect cell telephone towers and offer mobile telephone relays, such telephone service 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 landline network, as in Somalia.

When a state has failed or is in the process of failing, the effective educational and medical systems are privatized informally (with a resulting hodgepodge of shady schools and questionable health clinics in the cities), and 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, essential services may be provided only to the favored half, but naturally not to the half in rebellion and engulfed in war. Most of the time the destroyed nation-state completely under-performs. Literacy rates fall, infant mortality rises, the HIV/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 miserable.

Failed states offer unparalleled economic opportunity—but only for a privileged few. Those clustered 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 wellbeing and personal prosperity of all of its citizens is conspicuously absent, if it ever existed.

Corruption flourishes, not only in failed states, but in them it often thrives 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 non-existent activities become more costly; and persistent and generalized extortion becomes the norm. In such situations, corrupt ruling elites mostly invest their gains overseas, not at home, making the economic failure of their states 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 slurp ravenously from the same illicit troughs as their civilian counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

An indicator of failure, but not a cause of failure, is declining real national and per capita levels of annual gross domestic product (GDP, or GNI, in the World Bank's latest compilations). 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 the population. High official state deficits (Zimbabwe's reached more than 30 percent of GDP in 2002) fund lavish security expenditures and the siphoning of cash by friendly elites. Inflation usually soars because rulers raid the central bank and also print money. From the resulting economic insecurity, often engineered by rulers so as to maximize their own personal fortunes and their own political and economic power, there are many rents to be collected by entrepreneurs connected to the prevailing regime. Smuggling soars. 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 regular pursuit.

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, and an elaborate Kennedy School of Government student quantitative measurement of outputs as proxies for Corruption, the World Bank Institute's 2001 Governance Indicators (<http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/pdf/2001kkzcharts.xls>) evaluate the nation states with which this article is primarily concerned according to their "control of corruption," as well as rule of law, government effectiveness, voice and accountability, and political stability. All of the failed or collapsed states rank at the bottom of the corruption measure, except for Sierra Leone. These last data are of an anomalous character. For the Kennedy School measurement, see Robert I. Rotberg, "Improving Governance in the Developing World: Creating a Measuring and Ranking System," unpublished paper, presented at "Creating a New Ranking System for Governance" conference at the Kennedy School of Government, April, 2004.

Sometimes, especially if there are intervening climatic disasters, the economic chaos and generalized neglect that is endemic to failed states lead to regular food shortages and widespread hunger—indeed, even to episodes of starvation and major international humanitarian relief efforts. Natural calamities 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 neglected populations beyond the edge of endurance and into starvation. Once such populations have lost their subsistence plots and their sources of income, they lose 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 languishes, and once what little capacity remains is devoted almost exclusively to the fortunes of a few or to a favored ethnicity or community, then 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 the state, their legitimacy, and the state’s legitimacy, plummets. The state increasingly comes to be perceived as being owned by an exclusive class or group, with all others pushed aside. The social contract that binds inhabitants to an overarching polity is 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 times 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, sub-state actors took over, as they always do when the prime polity disappears. Those warlords or sub-state actors gained control over regions and sub-regions 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 fact that the collapsed state has been parceled out into warlord fiefdoms, there still is a prevalence of disorder, anomic behavior, and

the kinds of anarchic mentality and entrepreneurial endeavors—especially trafficking in guns and drugs—that are characteristic of 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.” Haiti, Zimbabwe, and Côte d’Ivoire were moving in 2003–2004 rapidly from being weak toward “failing” and into catastrophic failure.

The quality of failed or collapsed is real, but need not be static. Failure is a fluid halting place, with movement back to weakness and forward into collapse always possible. As definitely undesirable results for states failure and collapse are neither inevitable nor unavoidable. Whereas weak states fail much more easily than strong ones, that failure need not be 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.

*Weak* states include a broad continuum of states that are: inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; or they may basically be strong, but temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism, or external attacks. Weak states typically harbor ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal tensions that have not yet become overtly violent, at least not on a large scale. Urban crime rates tend to be increasingly high. In weak states, the ability to provide adequate amounts of other political goods is diminished or is diminishing. Physical infrastructural networks are 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. Extreme weakness leads to a failing or failed state.

There is a special category of weak state, the seemingly strong one, always an autocracy, which rigidly controls dissent and is secure but at the same time provides very few political goods.<sup>6</sup> In extreme cases, such as North Korea, the regime permits its people to starve. Cambodia under Pol Pot also qualified for this category, as do contemporary Belarus and Turkmenistan. In recent times, the list of states that are fundamentally weak but appear strong is even more extensive.

### ***NATO, the EU, and Failing and Failed States***

The European Union rightly equates state failure with “bad governance,” and with corruption, abuses of power, weak institutions, and the lack of accountability. The EU’s definitive strategy paper also appreciates that civil conflict is always present in conditions of failure, and that such conflict corrodes states from within. Its analysis mirrors the one presented in this paper, associating state failure with the rise of crime and the increased possibility of terror. “State

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<sup>6</sup> See Erin Jenne, “Sri Lanka: A Fragmented State,” in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), pp. 219-20.

failure,” it says in an understated manner, “is an alarming phenomenon, that undermines global governance, and adds to regional instability.”<sup>7</sup>

For all of the EU’s understanding of the extent of the failed state problem, it has only a limited strategy for how best to prevent states from failing. It obviously favors good government in the Balkans, especially the fostering of democracy and the battling of organized crime. But, it does not say how Europe should or could improve democracy in the region. Nor does it say much in detail about how Europe should counter the spread of state failure. Its strategy paper agrees that the problem should not be neglected, and it indicates that military measures may be needed to restore order in failed states, but nowhere does it provide a means whereby such imperatives could be realized.

Europe’s main concern, naturally, is Europe. North Korea and South Asia’s nuclear capabilities may threaten Europe, as may failed states in Africa, but Europe’s task, the document declares, “is to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean....” Additionally, Europe needs “to be able to act before countries around [Europe] deteriorate...” Preventive engagement is critical, and can avoid future problems -- in and near Europe.<sup>8</sup> Any European force projection will obviously be devoted primarily to improving conditions for stability in and near Europe. Likewise, NATO’s Prague Summit Declaration of 2002, announcing the formation of a NATO Response Force, implied that it would be readied for use largely in the “Euro-Atlantic” area and on the borders of Europe. Failed states beyond the Balkans are never mentioned.<sup>9</sup> A NATO contingent has since been assigned to Afghanistan, where it is helping to strengthen a once failed state.

Critics of the limited nature of the EU and NATO responses to the large problem of state failure urge the EU, particularly, and member states, to a) tighten controls over arms exports from the EU, and b) give a much higher priority to tackling state failure.

EU countries are significant suppliers of small arms and light weapons; all of the intrastate conflicts of the developing world are fueled by the bountiful supply of inexpensive small arms and light weapons. The 12 to 14 million people that have been killed in the failed state wars of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were direct casualties of the proliferation of such weapons. Mass destruction in our era has indeed emanated from small arms and light weapons, not the so-called WMDs.<sup>10</sup>

EU countries supply weapons to conflict ridden countries and are involved in brokering arms deals throughout the developing world. The 1998 EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports offers a framework for discussions of licensing arrangements, but the enforcement of the Code is limited and largely porous. Thus, the EU could seek to strengthen the Code by making it legally binding on the member nations. It could insist on greater transparency (following the U.S. lead),

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<sup>7</sup> European Union, “A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy,” 12 December 2003.

<sup>8</sup> See Javier Solana, “A Secure Europe in a Better World,” European Council document, 20 June 2003; “EU Security Doctrine,” Deutsche Press-Agentur, 19 June 2003 (from Thessaloniki, Greece).

<sup>9</sup> NATO Council, Prague Summit Declaration, 21-22 November 2002, NATO Press Release.

<sup>10</sup> See Michael Klare and Robert I. Rotberg, *The Scourge of Small Arms* (Cambridge, MA: World Peace Foundation, 1999).

especially demanding annual reports on each nation's export policy and numbers. It could introduce a standard licensing system for arms brokers. Best of all, there now are ways of marking weapons and ammunition. Those methods could be made mandatory.

With regard to state failure, per se, the EU could do more than it now does to improve living standards within failed states, and contribute far more to the eradication of tropical diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. The European security strategy focuses on military means of minimizing state failures; it should now devote equal attention to some of the underlying conditions of state failure, especially economic, social, and political insufficiency. "Whenever possible, European countries need to help build up effective institutions in weak states. That means not just competent institutions, but also states that are more open, democratic and accountable, which protect the rights of the poor, women and minority communities."<sup>11</sup>

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

Whatever the Europeans and NATO do, the problem of preventing weak states from becoming failed states, and failed states from collapsing, will remain a crucial problem for the norms and forces of world order.

*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 foregoing examples indicate, that atrophy is neither inevitable nor the result of happenstance. To fail a state is not that easy. Crossing from weakness into failure takes will as well as neglect. Thus, weak nation-states need not tip into failure. Anarchy, security dilemmas, and predation all combine synergistically to tip a weak state into a failing or failed mode. At several stages, preventive measures could arrest the downward movement, but once non-state actors have a cause, a following, and access to arms, halting the desperate spiral of failure is difficult. By this time, leaders and states engaged in self-destruction usually possess too little credibility and too few resources to restore trust and claw back from the brink of chaos. Many leaders hardly recognize or care about the depths of their national despair. Instead, they focus on the rents and advantages that are still to be had as the state succumbs, and warfare spreads.

There are several interesting cases that test the precision of the distinction between weakness and failure, and how and in what circumstances weak or even conflict-prone states survive.

Sri Lanka was 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 Eelam (LTTE), a Tamil separatist insurgency. Additionally, the LTTE with relative impunity has been able to assassinate prime ministers, bomb presidents, kill rival Tamils, and, in 2001, even destroy the nation's civil air terminal and main air force base. But, as unable as the Sinhala-dominated governments of the island have been to put down the LTTE rebellion, the nation-state has still remained merely weak, never close to tipping 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

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<sup>11</sup> David Mephram, "An Ethical EU Foreign Policy--What Role for the UK?" discussion paper presented at a British Overseas NGOS for Development EU Assembly, 12 February 2004.

and east. The authority of successive governments extends securely to the Sinhala-speaking 80 percent of the country, and into the recaptured Tamil areas. Since the early 1990s, too, Sri Lanka has exhibited robust levels of economic growth. For these reasons, despite a consuming internal conflict founded on intense majority-minority discrimination and deprivation, and on pronounced ethnic and religious differences, official 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 Papua in the east, plus large pockets of Muslim-Christian conflict in Ambon and the Malukus, Muslim-Christian hostility in northern Sulawesi, and ethnic xenophobic outbursts in Kalimantan. Given all of these situations of conflict, 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, only the insurgents in Aceh and Papua want to secede and are battling the state. The 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, including the growth of terrorist movements, in the post-Soeharto era.

Tajikistan is another state that harbors the possibility of failure, in fact a relapse into 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>12</sup> Then Russia exerted itself in its former colony, claiming that its own security remained at risk because of lawlessness in there. Beginning in 1999, Russia reinforced its major base in Tajikistan, and started to provide more and more stability against internal dissidence, as well as a buffer for the Tajik government against Taliban or Uzbek-inspired adventurism. In this new century, despite its colonial heritage, Russia has become the guarantor of Tajikistan's integrity.

A number of other nation-states belong in the category of weak states that demonstrate a high failure potential. Nepal is a clear case since its Maoist insurgency began again roiling the mountains and plains of the monarchist country in 2002. 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 person 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 in 2004.

Likewise, the potential for open failure exists in those highly regimented states, such as North Korea and Turkmenistan, which could implode as soon as a dictator or a dictatorial regime is toppled. Because such states are held together entirely by repression, and not by performance, an

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<sup>12</sup> Nasrin Dadmehr, "Tajikistan: Regionalism and Weakness," in Rotberg (2003), p. 245.

end to or an easing of repression could create destabilizing battles for succession, resulting in 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.

Other weak states that contain the incubus of failure because of serious intercommunal antagonisms, but have managed effectively, albeit possibly only for the moment, to come to terms with or to bridge their divisions include Fiji, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, the Philippines, Lebanon, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, and Paraguay. Madagascar was also in that camp in 2003, but not in 2004.

Examples of other 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 Cambodia, East Timor, and Laos in Asia. Each has its own distinguishing features. Cambodia and Laos are ruled by autocrats unfriendly to civil society and 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, has entered its full majority without a cadre of experienced professionals and bureaucrats, and without much in the way of physical resources. The ability of such 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.

Three kinds of signals of impending failure: economic, political, and deaths in combat, provide clearer, timely, and actionable, warnings. On the economic front, Lebanon in 1972–1979, Nigeria in 1993–1999, Indonesia in 1997–1999, and Zimbabwe in 2001–2004 each provide instances of how a rapid decline in incomes and living standards indicated the possibility of failure early enough to understand that preventive measures needed to be taken.

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 themselves find clever ways to benefit from impoverishment and misery. As foreign and domestic investment dries up, jobs vanish, and per capita incomes fall, the majority of citizens in this 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 the legislature and the bureaucracy into subservience. They end judicial independence, curtail the media, 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 coterie. Many of these leaders grandly drive 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 oversize photographs in public places.

Levels of violence provide a third indicator. If they rise 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 available indicators discussed in this section, taken together, should provide both quantifiable and qualitative warnings. Then, avoidance maneuvers can occur and efforts to prevent disaster 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, torture reporters, or abuse the human rights of their subjects by X, or if soldiers occupy state house, or civilian death rates rise more than X per year, that the state in question will definitely tip from weak to failing to failed. All we know is that the sum of those actions suggests 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.

Failing states are a particular worry to the security of the twenty-first century. They are the weak states that likely to fail, and fail catastrophically. World order, and all of its components – the UN system, the European Union, NATO, and other regional organizations – thus need to seek a variety of ways to intervene to prevent or limit failure. It is obviously better and less costly to prevent failure than to cope with the trauma, dislocation, and chaos that accompanies failure. Early decisive action is better than dealing with the consequences of tardy action, failure, and collapse. It is in the world order's best interests to understand and then to meet the challenges of state weakness and failure.

Weak and failing states rank among the world's greatest threats to international peace and security today. While major threats to world peace used to come mainly from ideological, military, or economic competition among competing states, in modern times lethal threats are growing within states from communal tensions among rival factions, extremists groups with radical political agendas, and faltering regimes clinging to power and asserting militaristic ambitions. These are the driving forces of a growing world disorder. This article first examines this "emerging orthodoxy" of transnational security issues that reinforces the securitisation of poverty and the poor. It then subjects this orthodoxy to theoretical and empirical critique. The turmoil caused by weak and failing states gravely threatens U.S. security, yet Washington is doing little to respond. The United States needs a new, comprehensive development strategy combining crisis prevention, rapid response, centralized decision-making, and international cooperation. CRITICAL CONDITION. "Postconflict reconstruction" has become the foreign policy issue du jour in Washington. Multiple think-tank studies, a new State Department office, and no fewer than ten proposed congressional bills all tackle the subject. Weak and failed states and the chaos they nurture will inevitably harm U.S. security and the global economy that provides the basis for American prosperity.