



Title: When States Fail: Causes and Consequences

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When *States Fail* starts with the assumption that the rise and fall of nation-states is not new, but in the modern era when nation-states constitute the building blocks of the world order, the violent disintegration of select African, Asian, and Latin American states threatens the very foundation of that system. Divided into two parts – “The Causes and Prevention of Failure” and “Post-Failure Resuscitation of Nation-States” – the book explores the nature of failure and collapse among the developing world’s nation-states, and examines how such faltering or destroyed states may be resuscitated. In addition, the volume analyses the nature of state weakness, and advances reasons why some weak states succumb to failure, or collapse, and why others, in seemingly more strained circumstances, remain weak and at risk but do not destruct.

In the introductory chapter, Robert Rotberg elaborates on the criteria for distinguishing *collapse* and *failure* from generic weakness or apparent distress, and *collapse* from *failure*. His is a valuable contribution given that the phenomenon of state failure is under-researched, with the literature hitherto marked by imprecise definitions. Moreover, characterizing weak and failed states is an important endeavor because understanding exactly why weak states slide toward failure will help policymakers design methods of preventing failure and, in the cases of states that nevertheless fail (or collapse), to revive them and assist in their rebuilding.

Rotberg argues that nation-states fail when they are consumed by internal violence and cease delivering positive political goods to their inhabitants. Their governments lose credibility, and the continuing nature of the particular nation-state itself becomes questionable and illegitimate in the hearts and minds of its citizens.

Failed states are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and often contested bitterly by warring factions. In most failed states, official authorities face varied degrees of civil unrest, with government forces battling armed revolts led by one or more rival groups. 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.

The terms “collapsed” and “failed” designate the consequences of a process of decay at the nation-state level. Crossing from weakness into failure takes will as well as neglect. Weak nation-states need not tip into failure. Nelson Kasfir’s chapter suggests that anarchy, security dilemmas, and predation, all combine synergistically to tip a weak state into a failing or failed mode. At several stages, preventive or avoidance measures could arrest the downward movement, but once non-state actors have a cause and 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 rescue the state from the brink of chaos.

A key proposition of this volume is that state failure is largely man made, not accidental. Cultural clues are relevant, but insufficient to explain persistent leadership flaws. Likewise, institutional fragilities and structural flaws contribute to failure, as van de Walle’s chapter suggests, but those deficiencies usually hark back to decisions or actions of men (rarely women).

There is a school of thought, represented in this volume in chapters by Christopher Clapham and Jeffrey Herbst, which suggests that state failure reflects misplaced forms of sovereignty. Clapham suggests that in certain regions of the world, the existence of states is a pretence. In his view, full Westphalian sovereignty should never have been accorded to fragile postcolonial entities with no history and experience of performing as, or organizing, a state. A case can be made that state failure and collapse has been accelerated by the imposition of levels of state control upon indigenous societies unable to bear state-centered norms and such degrees of authority. After postcolonial independence some nations were simply too inchoate and were destined to fail. As a matter of fact, the modern state has worked best in the developing world where there was a preexisting traditional political culture of stateness.

Indeed, both Clapham and Herbst assert that state failure and collapse emanate not from artificial borders, colonial mistakes, colonial exploitation, or insufficient or misplaced tutelage, but from the automatic and premature assumption by former imperial administrative units of unsustainable state-like responsibilities.

Herbst goes so far as to recommend that states that cease to exercise formal control over parts of their nominal territories should lose their sovereignty, that is, be decertified. They should also lose sovereign status if they fail to project authority or fail to provide basic services outside the capital or a few cities. If they are unable to perform, and no longer supply political goods they should be delisted. Membership in the UN General Assembly should not necessarily be forever.

State failure is normally associated with intrastate violence, the rise of non-state actors, an increased lethality of the weapons employed in offensive and defensive combat, a shady trade in small arms, and a reciprocal commerce in illegally mined and exported minerals, timber, narcotics, and women and children, that would pay for the desired guns and ammunition. Michael Klare’s chapter sets out the global character of the licit and illicit trade in arms and light weapons, and explains how both forms of commerce impinge on state failure. When an internal arms race has begun, time for peace is fast running out and failure is probable.

An underlying theme of this volume is that reducing the global incidence of state failure and collapse is essential to the peace of the world, to saving poor inhabitants of troubled territories from havoc and misery, and combating terror. Prevention is always preferable to, and less costly than, remediation. This theme is made explicit in David Carment’s chapter, as well as in those of Jens Meierhenrich and Susan Rose-Ackerman.

The chapter of Nat Colletta et al. demonstrates that unless demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration occur at the end of hostilities, fighting is likely to begin afresh, and a successful effort of reconstruction is likely to prove impossible. Colletta et al. advocate releasing ex-combatants from cantonment sites sooner rather than later so that they avoid becoming serious threats to security. Colletta et al. also remind us that creating

social cohesion around and through the ex-combatants is particularly critical, especially forging strong social relationships and trust across postwar fault lines. New governments would do well to foster informal networks and voluntary associations of former soldiers.

The importance of restoring or creating social capital in postconflict societies is discussed also in chapters by Jennifer Widner and Daniel Posner. Widner suggests that working with local officials to revive optimism, ensure human security, enhance leadership capacity, and improve the delivery of basic services, are each fundamental components of effective postconflict reconstruction. Central to strengthening the commitment of citizens to their government is trust. It is not surprising that Widner's survey data indicate that trust grows from reducing crime and strengthening the rule of law.

Posner's chapter indicates that under some circumstances state failure actually can energize associational activity. When a state collapses, as in Somalia, civil society can flower. Outsiders can help by approaching the problem counter-intuitively and supporting the communications infrastructure of civil society.

A common prescription is that only once a transitional administration or a new government has secured the cities and the countryside, disarmed and demobilized, established legal norms, stabilized the economy, and restored essential services, can or should its leaders and their opponents consider elections. Nevertheless, the reality is that elections sometimes must be used as war termination devices (as in Liberia). Or in some situations, a quick election is essential if renewed warfare is the likely alternative. As Terrence Lyon's chapter indicates, the electoral record is mixed because each ballot-casting exercise serves multiple, contradictory goals. Elections are always essential to the launching of postconflict democracies, but they can also exacerbate competition, polarize already fractured societies, institutionalize existing imbalances of power, and retard as well as advance the transition from war and failure to resuscitation and good governance. Lyons stresses the importance of demilitarizing politics and building strong political institutions before voters go to the polls; after the vote it may be too late.

The phenomenon of state failure has become a significant problem in several parts of Africa, and also a real threat to some countries in central and southeast Asia, and Latin America. Failure once held fewer implications for the peace and security of the globe since state weakness and failure could be isolated and kept distant from the rest of the world. Now, however, the failing of states not only causes their citizens to suffer, but also poses enormous dangers well beyond their own borders. Minimizing the possibilities of failure by strengthening the capacities of the nation-states of the developing world has thus become one of the critical all-consuming strategies and moral imperatives of the twenty-first century. Hence, this book is a welcome contribution that addresses urgent policy questions of the new millennium.