
FRAGILE STATES: STATE BUILDING IS NOT ENOUGH

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INTRODUCTION: WHY THE INCREASED INTEREST?

The recent international interest in so-called 'fragile states' is partly caused by the awareness that global security is increasingly linked to conditions of conflict, political instability and the lack of development anywhere in the world. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 were an eye-opener in this respect. The linkages between global security and a number of interrelated threats and trends are explored, for example, in the 2004 Report of the UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change¹ and at the September 2005 UN World Summit.

Another source of interest originates within the development community and its aim to realise the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Although steady progress towards these goals is being made in many parts of the world, it became clear that fragile states lag seriously behind.

In both trains of thought, it is increasingly thought that a functioning state is crucial to reduce fragility and facilitate development. This explains the focus on state building in policies dealing with fragile countries.

This chapter will explore the reasons for the increased international interest, what fragile states are and why they are likely to remain on the international agenda. It will discuss global and in-country factors and trends, concluding that these will probably lead to an increase in state fragility in the coming decades. It will then turn to the policy implications, arguing that a limited focus on state building in these countries is unlikely to solve the issues. The industrialised states will have to effectively address factors leading to fragility that they themselves are largely responsible for.

¹ See <<http://www.un.org/secureworld/>>.

WHAT ARE FRAGILE STATES?

There is no internationally accepted definition or listing of fragile states. This is partly so because the term is used for a very heterogeneous group of countries struggling with problems of governance, security and/or development. State fragility is not a clear-cut condition; rather there is a continuum from collapsed states to well-functioning states. Politically, the term is felt to be stigmatising by the countries concerned, which hinders acceptance of the concept. Various other terms are in use, like 'failing states', 'failed states' or 'collapsed states', indicating a scale of increasingly problematic situations.

The Failed States Index, which is published annually since 2005 by the Fund for Peace, is one of the more transparent efforts to rank states on indicators of state failure (defined as internal conflict and state collapse).² The Index uses 12 indicators. Four indicators cover social aspects (e.g., mounting demographic pressures), two are economic indicators (e.g., sharp and/or severe economic decline) and six political indicators (e.g., criminalisation and/or delegitimation of the state). Of the 177 countries ranked in 2008, 35 were in the (most serious) alert zone and 92 in the warning zone. The top 5 are Somalia, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Chad and Iraq. An overwhelming majority of alert states are in Africa (Central, Horn and West) and to a lesser extent in Central Asia (e.g., Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh).

Many development aid donors stress that failures of good governance lie at the heart of state fragility. The governance systems in fragile states are seen as lacking in resilience, in strong interaction between state and society and in a dynamic social contract between the two. Fragile states are defined as states where the government cannot or will not deliver the core functions to its population. These core functions are generally seen to consist of security and the rule of law, the delivery of basic public goods and services, political legitimacy and development.³ The development analysis of fragile states limits itself to low-income countries.

Other actors, e.g., in the domains of foreign policy and defence, rightly place emphasis on external threats and shocks that can put pressure on the capacity and resilience of countries and their governments.⁴ The models developed are very helpful to illustrate the complexity of state fragility, and the large number of possible causes or triggers, as well as internal and external stabilising factors.

² See <<http://www.fundforpeace.org>>.

³ ODI – JICA, 'Donors and the "Fragile States" Agenda: A Survey of Current Thinking and Practice', 2006 <http://www.odi.org.uk/events/horizons_nov06/15dec/JICA%20Report.pdf>.

⁴ E.g., the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, see <http://www.strategy.gov.uk/work_areas/countries_at_risk/index.asp>.

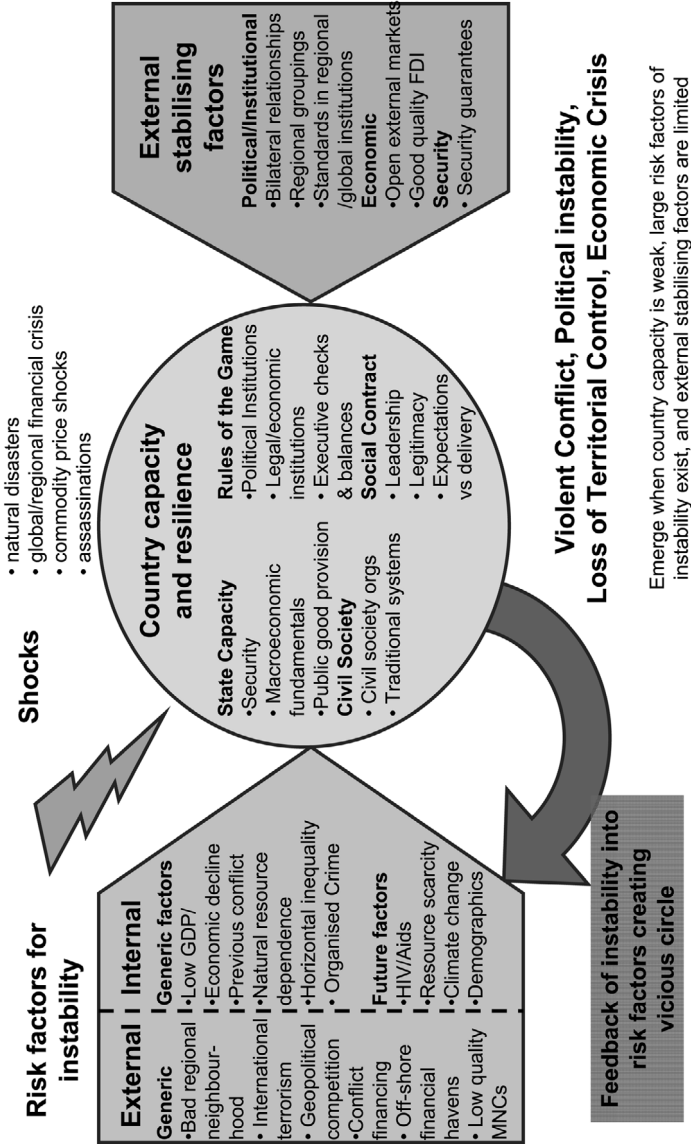


Figure 1. The Instability Framework

Figure 1 is the model developed by the United Kingdom Prime Minister's Strategy Unit.⁵

Fragility (in the form of violent conflict, political instability, and/or economic crisis) emerges when country resilience is weak, internal but also external risk factors and/or shocks for instability are high and external stabilising factors are insufficient. Instability feeds back and strengthens risk factors of instability, creating a vicious circle. The framework (see Fig. 1) retains the capacity and resilience of the state as the central factor of state fragility, but it creates more balance between internal and external causes and remedies.

Various efforts have been made to classify fragile states into more homogeneous sub-categories which would help analysis and policy development. A simple classification used by DFID takes two dimensions of governance (government capacity and political will) as defining characteristics and distinguishes three types of fragile states: 'weak-weak' (both political will and capacity are weak), 'weak but willing' (political will is present but capacity is weak) and 'strong but unresponsive' (capacity is strong but political willingness for development is weak; these states may be repressive).⁶ Note that the latter category of 'strong' states is nevertheless considered fragile, since the states in question do not deliver core functions like poverty reduction.

Another helpful classification, used by the World Bank among others, tries to add trends in governance and in the overall context of the countries concerned, and distinguishes:⁷

- Deterioration: capacity and/or willingness to perform core state functions in decline, economic and social indicators falling (e.g., Zimbabwe, Papua New Guinea);
- Arrested development, prolonged crisis or impasse: lack of willingness, failure to use authority for development (e.g., Guinea-Conakry, Fiji);
- Post-conflict transition: peace accord opens the window of opportunity to work with government on reform, capacity low, willingness may be high or low (e.g., Liberia, Afghanistan, Sudan);
- Early recovery or reform: willingness and efforts to improve performance but uneven results, may be post-conflict or not (e.g., Sierra Leone).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ DFID, 'Why we need to work more effectively in fragile states', London, January 2005.

⁷ Cf. World Bank, 'Fragile States – Good practice in country assistance strategies', Washington, December 2005; and Brinkerhoff, 'Capacity Development in Fragile States', Maastricht, ECDPM, May 2007.

A third classification ranks conflict-affected fragile states according to the conflict phase, distinguishing states at risk of conflict (e.g., Nigeria), states in the midst of war (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo) and post-conflict states emerging (or trying to emerge) from external or civil war.⁸ A further sub-classification of post-conflict states is helpful for operational purposes, distinguishing the three phases of stabilisation, reorganisation plus institution building, and consolidation, together covering a period of some ten years.⁹

In all classifications the assignment of countries to sub-classes remains a hazardous job since this will necessarily involve an amount of subjective assessment of the country context. Moreover, fragile situations may change very quickly, with states moving between sub-classes.

PAST AND FUTURE TRENDS IN STATE FRAGILITY

Systematic attention to fragile states with various actors is of recent interest (2002-2005), so past trends have not been much analysed from this perspective. But if one takes the number of internal armed conflicts (civil wars) as a proxy indicator, the findings show a decline since 1990. The number of armed conflicts has steadily decreased from a peak of 51 in 1992 to 31 at the end of 2005. Practically all of these conflicts were (or are) civil wars. Since the number of states has increased in the same period (from 159 to 192) the number of countries affected has decreased even more. While in 1990 almost one in four countries was directly affected by armed conflict on its territory, in 2005 only slightly above one in nine was.¹⁰ At the same time, the number of UN peacekeeping missions has been growing in this period, from 10 in 1990 to the current 19 peace missions directed and supported by the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations.¹¹ It would seem that this trend reflects the increasing concern over the global negative effects of local conflicts and fragile states.

Can we extrapolate this decline in armed conflicts to future trends of state fragility? The answer is probably not. One reason is that the decline in armed conflict need not be durable. An International Peace Academy study notes: 'If we head into a period in which proxy war (against terrorists or groups described as such) comes back into style, or prospects of cooperation between major international players diminish, there is a risk that this trend will be shorter-lived

⁸ Larry Diamond, 'Promoting Democracy in Post-Conflict and Failed States, Lessons and Challenges', 2 *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, No. 2 (2006) pp. 93-116.

⁹ See Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), 2005.

¹⁰ 'Towards a more peaceful world' Oslo, IPRI, September 2006, see: <http://www.prio.no/files/file48260_prio_uppsala_eng_press_release_020906.pdf>.

¹¹ See <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/bnote.htm>>.

than hoped.¹² The conflict zones where IPI¹³ can imagine future wars are broadly the alert zones of the Failed States Index cited above.

Another reason is that trends in some of the global threats that likely affect fragile states are not positive. The Instability Framework (see Fig. 1) points, e.g., to the role of climate change, global economic crises, scarcities, terrorism, etc. Current negative trends in these factors might very well aggravate state fragility in the world.

Climate change may increase the risk of ‘natural’ shocks¹⁴ and tends to reinforce existing tensions within and between countries. Impacts to be expected are the loss of infrastructure, resource scarcity and mass displacement of peoples, while security consequences are expected in the form of civil unrest, inter-communal violence and international instability.¹⁵

Water shortages create tensions, especially in regions where several countries rely on the same water sources – e.g., the river Nile in North Africa, the river Jordan in the Middle East and several rivers in South-East and Central Asia. Access and distribution issues could contribute to internal or regional conflicts.

Scarcities of energy, especially oil, pose another potentially destabilising factor. China’s quest for oil in Africa already has serious implications for the world’s policies towards fragile states, e.g., in the case of Sudan and its Darfur region. The conflicts in the Middle East present another well known energy-linked example.

Economic crises, when they occur, strongly and negatively affect fragile states. The sudden severe decline of economic growth is one of the proven predictors of conflict and instability. Scarcities and price increases for commodities and especially food are closely linked to this risk factor. Food riots, as they have occurred this year in various countries like, e.g., Haïti where they threatened the success of the peacekeeping mission, have a proven potential to destabilise countries.

But predicting future trends of state stability or fragility remains a precarious challenge, as illustrated by Donald Steinberg, the International Crisis Group’s Deputy President. Steinberg recalls how ‘in 1995, as the US President’s Special Assistant for Africa, I suggested Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia

¹² Charles T. Call & Elizabeth M. Cousens, *Ending wars and building peace. Coping with crisis* (New York, IPA, March 2007).

¹³ The International Peace Academy has since changed its name to the International Peace Institute (IPI).

¹⁴ Cf. ‘Climate Change and International Security, Paper from the High Representative and the European Commission to the European Council’, S113/08, 14 March 2008.

¹⁵ Chris Abbott, ‘An uncertain future: law enforcement, national security and climate change’, FRIDE, 2008.

and Kenya as anchors for the promotion of democracy, good governance, poverty reduction, military demobilization, debt relief and improvements in health, education and other social indicators. With large populations, vibrant economies, democratizing regimes, and internal stability, these countries could serve as entrepôts, sources of energy and transport infrastructures, channels of trade and investment, sources of negotiators and peacekeeping forces, models of proper behavior, and havens for refugees.¹⁶

In 2007 all of these countries are in the alert category of the Failed States Index, and that was even before the 2008 events in Kenya. Incidentally, this shows that there certainly were early warning signals for Kenya.

GENERAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF STATE FRAGILITY TRENDS

Fragile states will probably continue to affect world security and development. But the reverse is also true: global developments will continue to affect the more fragile states in the world. Curbing state fragility definitely requires international support for state building in these countries, and it is now on the agenda of most development actors (bilateral donors, multilateral organisations). However, just as important is that the more powerful international actors address the external risk factors of instability for which they largely bear responsibility. The most relevant ones would be: interference in fragile states for geopolitical reasons (proxy war against real or perceived terrorists, competition for oil or other scarce resources, control over zones of influence), management of global economic crises and management of climate change.

Addressing these issues, or at least incorporating the risks and costs of increased state fragility into the various policy considerations, would also shift fragile states policies from a curative to a more preventive approach. It would offer a better solution than the unsustainable burden of stabilisation operations that at present are undertaken to restore stability in states.

As Larry Diamond points out: ‘Stabilising a country is costly. And it is not only a question of money, for deployable military force is a far more finite resource than money alone. With more than 60,000 UN peacekeepers deployed, the world is running out of available forces for peacekeeping.’¹⁷

However, such approaches would require a thorough remake of the global architecture for the mobilisation and coordination of efforts towards fragile states. Deep divisions between the UN member states have hindered effective international intervention, as was spelled out at the September 2005 UN World Sum-

¹⁶ See <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5303&l=1>>.

¹⁷ Diamond, *supra* n. 8, pp. 93-116.

mit. Efforts are being undertaken to improve matters, e.g., through the Peace Building Commission (PBC) created at the summit. But although the PBC is beginning to show its effectiveness, its focus is not on the global factors that are so decisive as contributing factors of state fragility.

If, indeed, the world is 'moving inexorably from an order centred on a single super-power towards one of several competing poles'¹⁸ the deep divisions are likely to stay. The challenge will then be that the geopolitical competition is not fought out and in countries that are too fragile to withstand such interference.

A stable global economic order, while evidently of interest to the industrialised world, is also an important potential stabilising factor for state fragility. But, as Call and Cousens rightly observe,

'missing from virtually any analysis of international peacebuilding [...] is discussion of economic policy instruments that could have a powerful effect in combating state fragility and reversion to war, such as terms of trade, monetary policy, management of currency fluctuation, and so on. Over the longer term, these and other more systemic issues may exert a greater effect on the vulnerability of states to war or state weakness.'¹⁹

To these instruments could be added effective management of economic crises like the current food and credit crises.

Lastly, the area of climate management offers an area where the interests of the industrialised world and fragile states could coincide. The wish to curb state fragility could act as an additional incentive for the industrialised world to effectively address climate change issues.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands has a history of strongly supporting international order. Also in the domain of fragile states it is set to take its responsibility and address the policy implications mentioned above. The current government has committed itself to intensify its fragile states policy, and a policy paper detailing the approaches is being prepared. Part of the policy is to strengthen the international architecture for security and development, through the UN, EU, NATO, the World Bank and regional organisations.

¹⁸ Mark Leonard foresees, in addition to the United States, as emerging poles China, Russia, the EU and the Middle East, in: Mark Leonard, 'Divided world, the struggle for primacy in 2020', Centre for European Reform, January 2007.

¹⁹ Call & Cousens, *supra* n. 12.

In dealing with the problem of fragile states the Netherlands uses an integrated approach of security, governance and development interventions. Experiences in several post-conflict countries are promising, but have nevertheless shown that many questions remain as to how integrated approaches can be made to work effectively.

Some questions centre around the balance to be kept, in each specific country, between the military, political and development interventions. How could the military effort be tailored to support the political and development processes that would strengthen the states concerned, and *vice versa*? Other questions have to do with the capacity dilemma: both quick visible results and the engagement of local stakeholders are needed to retain the positive momentum of a peace process, but local stakeholders' capacities are generally too weak to deliver quickly. If external intervention is chosen as the way out of this dilemma it will have to walk the tightrope in choosing the scale and nature of the intervention. The intervention would be tailored to strengthen local drivers of change, and enhance (or at least not reduce) incentives for local government, civil society and private entrepreneurs to take their development into their own hands. In all of this the Netherlands fully appreciates that support for fragile states in their state-building effort is a highly political process, since it affects the fundamentals of the relations between elites and society. The central challenge may be to support the governments and societies in fragile states in getting the political solutions right.

Like other countries, the Netherlands still has to integrate policies on global threats into its fragile states policies. These new perspectives have to be added, on the one hand, to fragile states' policies and, on the other, to current policies for climate change, energy security, scarcities, terrorism, etc. Since the scale, urgency and nature of the interlinkages are not yet clear, it would be logical to start by researching these issues.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

The international policies on fragile states, although converging towards a fairly broad consensus, remain premised on comparatively shaky empirical evidence, mostly from the domain of security and development. For example, while there has been a considerable deepening of analysis about conflict trends in recent years, both the data on and the analysis of war recurrence remain surprisingly limited.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid.

Consequently, all of the areas of policy development indicated above need to be supported by a substantial research effort. For the development of integrated approaches, for example, research needs to work out for each of the tracks (security, governance and development) what works in which situations and how the tracks support or undermine each other. Questions of how to prioritise, coordinate and sequence activities in each of the tracks, and continuously calibrate the decisions in the light of changing circumstances remain to be solved. A crucial element is how to reinforce state-society interaction by involving the population, including women, as the drivers of reform.

In addition to the topics presented by the policy implications, two areas stand out to be taken up by research institutions. One is the issue of early warning, the second is the monitoring and evaluation of fragile states policies. A number of efforts in early warning are ongoing.²¹ Further development seems to be needed to extend the timeline of the projections, to integrate global threats and to link early warning systems to early action. A range of systems to serve various policy timeframes, e.g., early warning indexes (0-1 year), medium-term structural assessment (1-5 years) and long-term risk trends would have to be developed and linked to policy-making processes.²² The second topic of monitoring and evaluation is self-evident. Now that more and more international interventions are taking place in fragile states it is important to monitor and evaluate from the start the approaches and their results, to draw lessons to be learned and to build up further the body of knowledge. The OECD-DAC has taken up the challenge to lead policy development in the monitoring and evaluation of fragile states policies. But also here, additional work is needed to integrate the global risk factors and stabilising interventions into the monitoring and evaluation systems.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The increased interest in fragile states stems from different concerns (national interests as well as development concerns) and masks different and sometimes opposing objectives in combating state fragility. Development concerns tend to limit themselves to internal causes and remedies for fragile states. National interest approaches tend to focus on the stabilisation of the security situation in fragile states. Both approaches tend to neglect the impact of external factors in creating and maintaining state fragility. The highly developed countries of this

²¹ E.g., the Failed States Index of the Fund for Peace, the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy of Carleton University in Canada, the work of the UK Prime-Minister's Strategy Unit on Countries at Risk of Instability, and the EU Initiative for Peace project.

²² Recommendation of the UK FCO Countries at Risk of Instability Programme.

world are best placed to mitigate these factors. This is not to say that dealing with external factors is easy. It is saying that more focused intervention to mitigate external factors and their effects on state fragility could tip the scales of current fragile states policies towards success: to reduce fragility and facilitate security and development.