
19 Fixing failed states: a dissenting view

Justin Logan and Christopher Preble

19.1 INTRODUCTION: THE PRETENSE OF KNOWLEDGE¹

Few foreign-policy arguments are more widely accepted than the related claims that “failed states” present a global security threat and that, accordingly, powerful countries should “fix” the failed states (Helman and Ratner 1992–93; Rotberg 2003; Fukuyama 2004a; Fearon and Laitin 2004; Krasner and Pascual 2005; Scowcroft and Berger 2005; Ghani and Lockhart 2008). Despite their widespread currency, these ideas are based on a sea of confusion, poor reasoning and category errors. In an earlier work, we criticized the idea that state failure poses a threat on two main grounds. First, we examined existing lists of failed states and scrutinized the common claims about the relationship between “failedness” and threat. A cursory look at the Failed States Index or any other list of failed states makes eminently clear that failedness is not so much as correlated with, let alone the cause of, threats to faraway countries. (Logan and Preble 2006; *Economist* 2009) States that regularly rank highly on failedness indicators included Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti, which belonged clearly in the “non-threat” category. (Patrick 2007)

Second, we argued that even in the anecdotal case where a failed state did pose an important threat, Afghanistan, the failure itself did not produce the threat and moreover, attempting to repair the state would not have eliminated the threat. Indeed, Afghanistan was both less failed and more threatening once the Taliban took power. As we wrote at the time, attacking a threat rarely involves paving roads or establishing new judicial standards (Logan and Preble 2006).

Scholarship on state failure had begun before September 11, but the terrorist attacks that day provided a huge boost to the topic. Analysts concluded *en masse* that since Afghanistan was both a failed state and a threat, failed states were threatening. Moreover, after the United States toppled the rickety structure of the Iraqi state, it became clear that attempting to administer a failed state was difficult. The role these political events played in boosting interest in the topic of failed states is hard to overstate. Accordingly, it is difficult, and we do not attempt, to separate

the discussion of state failure from recent US efforts to form viable states in Iraq and Afghanistan. Similarly, we treat counterinsurgency and stabilization and reconstruction operations as close neighbors on an operational continuum rather than as separate categories.

Analysts have drawn one major lesson from the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent difficulties with the American response to them: if the United States could prevent state failure or repair failed states, it would reap gains not just in terms of international development but also in national security. Below we attempt to clarify both the concept of failed states and the likely implications of attempting to fix them.

This chapter proceeds in three sections. First, we outline the methodological and empirical problems with the scholarship on state failure and argue that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, state failure in itself poses no security concerns to foreign countries. Second, we show that attempts to fix failed states have a poor track record, and argue that reorienting national security bureaucracies toward a focus on state building is both unlikely and unwise. We conclude with a policy recommendation: given the minimal threat posed by state failure itself, and the difficulty in attempting to create viable states, foreign countries would be wise to avoid attempting to repair failed states.

19.1.1 What is a Failed State and Why Should Anyone Care?

Several elementary problems have hindered the study of state failure. The most significant is the fact that there is no agreed upon definition of the term “failed state.” Analysts have created a number of listings of failed states, which have, in fairness, overlapped considerably: all are populated by poor countries, many of which have been wracked by interstate or civil violence. (SFTFR 2000; DFID 2005; FSI 2009) However, instead of adhering to basic social-scientific standards of inquiry in which questions or puzzles are observed, and then theories are described and tested using clearly defined independent and dependent variables, analysts began by fabricating a category – failed state – and then attempted to create data sets from which theoretical inferences could be induced.

To take one prominent case, the authors of the “State Failure Task Force Report” contracted by the Central Intelligence Agency’s Directorate of Intelligence dramatically expanded their definition of “failed state” after their initial criteria did not produce an adequate data set for the quantitative tests the researchers wanted to perform. Working with the greatly expanded definition, the task force produced almost six times more countries that could be coded “failed” as compared with their original criteria, and then proceeded with their statistical analysis. They justified this highly

questionable decision on the judgment that “events that fall beneath [the] total-collapse threshold often pose challenges to US foreign policy as well.” (SFTFR 2000) Subsequently, the task force changed its name to the “Political Instability Task Force,” and appeared to back away from the term “failed state” (Call 2006). Still, one of the principal authors of the index persists in using the term, still without a clear, bounded working definition (Goldstone 2008).

Beyond methodological shortcomings, the lists of failed states reveal only that there are many countries plagued by severe problems. The top ten states in the 2009 Failed States Index include two countries the United States occupies (Iraq and Afghanistan), one country without any central government to speak of (Somalia), four poor African states (Zimbabwe, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic), two resource-rich but unstable African countries (Sudan and Guinea) and a nuclear-armed Muslim country, population 176 million (Pakistan). The sheer diversity of the countries on the lists makes clear that few policy conclusions could be drawn from a country’s designation as a failed state.

Repeatedly, though, US government agencies and officials have endorsed the notion that state failure is threatening. For example, the George W. Bush administration’s 2002 *National Security Strategy* was based on the argument that “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones” (Bush 2002, p. 1). Senator Richard Lugar, in support of the creation of the State Department’s nation-building office, claimed that “international crises are inevitable, and in most cases, US security interests will be threatened by sustained instability” (NPR 2004). The 2005 *National Intelligence Strategy* claimed that “the lack of freedom in one state endangers the peace and freedom of others, and . . . failed states are a refuge and breeding ground of terrorism” (ODNI 2005). Barack Obama argued in 2007 that “since extremely poor societies and weak states provide optimal breeding grounds for disease, terrorism, and conflict,” the United States must “invest in building capable, democratic states that can establish healthy and educated communities, develop markets, and generate wealth” (Obama 2007). The 2009 “whole-of-government” counterinsurgency manual claims that “in today’s world, state failure can quickly become not merely a misfortune for local communities, but a threat to global security” (USICI 2009).

Prominent foreign-policy scholars agree. *Eminences grises* such as Samuel “Sandy” Berger and Brent Scowcroft reached across the political aisle to intone in unison that “[a]ction to stabilize and rebuild states marked by conflict is not ‘foreign policy as social work,’ a favorite quip of the 1990s. It is equally a humanitarian concern and a national security priority.”

(CFR 2005, p. 6) In 2005, Stephen Krasner and Carlos Pascual claimed that “weak and failed states pose an acute risk to US and global security” (Krasner and Pascual 2005, p. 153). According to Francis Fukuyama, “it should be abundantly clear that state weakness and failure is [sic] the single most critical threat to US national security” (Fukuyama 2004c). Similarly, Pauline Baker of the Fund for Peace references the Afghanistan example, arguing that if a threat could arise from “that war-torn, shattered country, it can happen in virtually any decayed state” (Baker 2005).

In particular, the concept of the “war on terror” has become, in the minds of many experts, a war to fix failed states (Jones 2008). David Kilcullen, a former adviser to former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and CENTCOM commander General David Petraeus, has described the fight against terrorism as a “global counterinsurgency,” and argues that it is “corruption, bad policies, poor governance, and lack of development that generate the threat in the first place” (Kilcullen 2009, p. 289). Counterinsurgency, in Kilcullen’s telling, constitutes “armed social work; an attempt to redress basic social and political problems while being shot at” (Kilcullen 2006, p. 8). As another scholar of counterinsurgency stated the case:

Victory in the Long War requires the strengthening of literally dozens of governments afflicted by insurgents who are radicalised by hatred and inspired by fear. The soldiers who will win these wars require an ability not just to dominate land operations, but to change whole societies. (Nagl 2008, p. 83)

Many of the arguments about the alleged relationship between state failure and international security threats are framed in peculiarly ordinal terms. For instance, the Bush administration’s argument that “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones” cannot tell us much about the absolute value of the danger posed by failing states – or the resulting costs policymakers should be prepared to incur to attempt to protect against it. America faces an extraordinarily low threat of being overcome by a conquering state. Accordingly, identifying failed states as posing a more significant problem than the trivial danger posed by conquering states tells us little about how threatening they are, let alone what sorts of opportunity costs would be worth paying to counter the threat.

Similarly, the whole-of-government COIN guide’s claim that “in today’s world, state failure can quickly become . . . a threat to global security” is logically valid but practically worthless (USICI 2009). Any number of problems *could* evolve into threats, but this is only the beginning of analysis. The job of the intelligence analyst, foreign-policy scholar, or policymaker is to attempt to determine the likelihood of such a scenario coming to pass. Unfortunately, however, these claims rooted only in relative

threat and logical possibility have been taken to inform policy without engaging contrary theories or empirical realities – or engaging seriously with the likely costs of attempting to fix failed states.

A recent study by James A. Piazza offers a quantitative analysis of the relationship between state failure and terrorism. The study represents a real methodological leap forward, clearly defining independent and dependent variables and performing regression analysis to attempt to link incidence of terrorism with ranking on the Failed States Index. Piazza concludes that state failure is a powerful predictor of the incidence of terrorism and offers a policy argument that “addressing the problem of failed and failing states should be the key strategy in the war on terror, rather than a mere acknowledgement found in anti-terrorism strategy documents” (Piazza 2008, p. 483).

Piazza’s work adds considerably more social-scientific rigor to the study of failed states, but the article itself suffers from important flaws. First, for its dependent variable, the study uses a database containing recorded terrorist plots against all countries, of wildly varying degrees of lethality. However, the “war on terror” is concerned primarily with attacks targeted at the United States and its allies rather than terrorism in the abstract. Similarly, countries generally place higher priority on countering more lethal attacks. By counting all incidents of terrorism equally as US or global concerns, Piazza draws inappropriate inferences from his data.

Second, the study produced noteworthy results from its control variables, many of which wound up as significant predictors of whether a particular country would produce transnational terrorists. Based on Piazza’s research, if policymakers had concerns about preventing terrorism, they should consider, in addition to state failure, the following factors: countries in which the executive branch has few constraints produce fewer terrorists (FSI 2008, p. 69);² countries with newer regimes produce fewer terrorists; countries with smaller populations produce fewer terrorists; countries with greater land area produce fewer terrorists; and countries that are less developed produce fewer terrorists (Piazza 2008, p. 482–3). While one could argue that some of these attributes are beyond outside control and others are outweighed by other considerations, one could level the same protests at Piazza’s policy argument that fixing failed states should be at the center of US counterterrorism strategy.

As this discussion makes clear, research on failed states constitutes “an eminently political discourse, counseling intervention, trusteeship, and the abandonment of the state form for wide swaths of the globe” (Gourevitch 2005). The category “failed state” is itself a construction that opens the door for such norms to be imported and provides justification to a variety of Western interventions. The lack of conceptual and theoretical clarity

defies even correlation between the supposed independent (failedness) and dependent (threat) variables, reducing the concept itself to something more like “countries with important problems.”

The obvious conclusion that should be drawn from the efforts to generate lists and rankings of failed states is that the category itself is not particularly useful and hopelessly broad. Interestingly, the proponents of the “failed state” construction acknowledge that there is extraordinary variance among failed states and little that ties them together.

For instance, the 2007 update of the *Fund for Peace/Foreign Policy* magazine “Failed States Index” promises on the magazine’s cover to explain “why the world’s weakest countries pose the greatest danger.” The opening lines of the article declare that failed states “aren’t just a danger to themselves. They can threaten the progress and stability of countries half a world away.” Strikingly, then, the article does little to back up or even argue these claims. It instead concedes that “failing states are a diverse lot” and that “there are few easy answers to their troubles” (FSI 2007, pp. 54, 56) By 2009, the Index was conceding that “greater risk of failure is not always synonymous with greater consequences of failure,” and that the state failure-terrorism link “is less clear than many have come to assume” (FSI 2009, p.82).

Given these concessions undermining the validity of the category “failed state,” one wonders why scholars continue to study failed states at all. The purpose, one would think, of creating a new category of states would be to unify countries that share attributes that can inform either how we think about these states (for academic purposes) or how we craft policies toward these states (for policy purposes). By the standards that have characterized the scholarship on state failure, Washington think tanks and academics could begin drawing up lists of “Countries that Begin with the Letter I,” or “Countries between the 35th and 70th Meridians,” and simply begin drawing up policy proposals for dealing with the states in question, while conceding the extreme variance inherent in their categories. But the category “failed state” has produced an assumption in Western policy circles that state failure represents a particular sort of problem that diplomats, military officials, and scholars must attempt to solve. Despite repeated assertions and insinuations to the contrary, learning that a task force has deemed a particular state “failed” is not useful for threat assessment.

19.2 THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL³

Rooted in the flawed theorizing on failed states, foreign-policy experts have proposed a variety of strategies for targeting and repairing them. In

general, however, analysts who grasp the scale of the challenge of assembling viable states have converged on policy proposals that bear a startling resemblance to colonialism.

Some scholars have proposed a policy of simply seizing political control of failed states for some period of time – or indefinitely. To take one prominent example, political scientists James Fearon and David Laitin propose a policy of “neotrusteeship, or more provocatively, postmodern imperialism” as the solution to weak states. For Fearon and Laitin, after foreign powers have seized political control of a country, “the search for an exit strategy is delusional, if this means a plan under which full control of domestic security is to be handed back to local authorities by a certain date in the near future.” Rather, the endgame is “to make the national level of government irrelevant for people in comparison to the local and supranational levels” (Fearon and Laitin 2004).

Policy practitioners have endorsed a similar view. Stephen Krasner, a scholar who would later become the director of policy planning in the Bush administration’s State Department, wrote that foreign countries should seek to “eliminate the international legal sovereignty of the entity or control treaty-making powers in whole or in part (for example, in specific areas such as security or trade). There would be no assumption of a withdrawal in the short or medium term.” Krasner also offered advice on how to avoid charges of colonialism:

For policy purposes, it would be best to refer to shared sovereignty as “partnerships.” This would more easily let policymakers engage in organized hypocrisy, that is, saying one thing and doing another . . . Shared sovereignty or partnerships would make no claim to being an explicit alternative to conventional sovereignty. It would allow actors to obfuscate the fact that their behavior would be inconsistent with their principles. (Krasner 2004)

Development experts with interest in state failure agree. Paul Collier, for example, writes that outside powers should take on the responsibility of providing public goods in failed states, including security guarantees to indigenous governments that pass Western democracy tests, and the removal of guarantees coupled with the encouragement of coups against governments that fail such tests (Collier 2009).

In part, these sweeping admonitions to simply seize politico-military control of the countries in question result from the failure to determine which, if any, of the “failedness” indicators should be addressed first, or whether there is any order at all. While some studies have proposed hierarchies of objectives, starting with security and ending with development (Dobbins et al. 2007, p. 14–15), it is clear that for many analysts, the causal arrows zigzag across the diagram. Each metric is tangled up with others,

forcing those arguing for intervention to advocate simultaneous execution of a number of extraordinarily ambitious tasks. David Kilcullen lists “cueing and synchronization of development, governance, and security efforts, building them in a simultaneous, coordinated way that supports the political strategy” as only one of eight “best practices” for counterinsurgents (Kilcullen 2009, p. 265).

Discussing this dilemma of these interlocking objectives in the context of Afghanistan, Rory Stewart remarks that:

Policymakers perceive Afghanistan through the categories of counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, state-building and economic development. These categories are so closely linked that you can put them in almost any sequence or combination. You need to defeat the Taliban in order to build a state and you need to build a state in order to defeat the Taliban. There cannot be security without development, or development without security. If you have the Taliban you have terrorists, if you don't have development you have terrorists, and as Obama informed the *New Yorker*, “If you have ungoverned spaces, they become havens for terrorists.” (Stewart 2009)

Not only do all bad things go together in these analyses, but it becomes difficult if not impossible to discern which objective should be the primary focus of state-building efforts. Similarly, on the issue of state building and democracy, Francis Fukuyama informs readers that “before you can have a democracy, you must have a state, but to have a legitimate and therefore durable state you must have democracy.” Those who dizzily fall off this logical merry-go-round are then helped up and reassured with the admonition that “the two are intertwined, but the precise sequencing of how and when to build the distinct but interlocking institutions needs very careful thought” (Fukuyama 2005, p. 88). Such advice should be cold comfort to policymakers who are being urged forward by the same experts to perform these ambitious tasks.

Fixing failed states promises to be an extraordinarily complex, difficult and potentially violent enterprise. Existing national-security institutions are ill-suited for success in this task. The most powerful (and most active) Western militaries were designed to pursue the object of killing enemy forces and destroying material assets. Similarly, the diplomatic corps of Western countries were designed for relating to foreign countries rather than governing them. Accordingly, a number of policy reports have called for radical reforms of the national security establishment, particularly in the United States, so that it can be better tailored to repair failed states (Fukuyama 2005, p. 88).

The history of state formation has been violent and protracted, however, and there are few examples of foreign powers successfully fashioning and

implanting a functioning, self-sustaining state. Two large problems inhibit successful state building. First is the inexistence in many countries of a nation, as discrete from the institutions of statehood. Second, and equally important, is the high cost of pressing together the disparate tribes and factions that populate many failed states. The formation of European states is a highly imperfect but helpful tool of comparison.⁴

Historically, few states emerged with citizens shuffling out of the previous order of indirect rule and fragmented sovereignty to sign on the dotted line of a national social contract. To the contrary, most modern states – and certainly most nations, in Western Europe – emerged from the exigencies of preparations for war against outside powers. Writing of the emergence of national states in Europe, Charles Tilly observes that “war wove the European network of national states, and preparation for war created the internal structures of the states within it” (Tilly 1990, p. 76). Very little of the literature urging a strategy of state building across poorly governed nations grapples with the fact that effective institutions of domestic governance emerged in Europe *alongside* military institutions. Tilly suggests that in the developing world, the disproportionate power and influence of military institutions as compared with civilian ones can help explain much of the problem of poor governance (Tilly 1985, p. 186).

Tilly referred to two crucial tactics employed by European state makers: homogenization and bargaining. Homogenization describes leaders’ efforts to create “a linguistically, religiously, and ideologically homogenous population” (Tilly 1990, p. 186). In other words, a nation. Bargaining constituted buying off capital-holders by agreeing to provide a number of public goods in cities, including “pensions, payments to the poor, public education, city planning, and much more” (Tilly 1990, p. 186). This bargaining created an interface between citizens and the central state. The bureaucracies and agencies that administered these programs were tied, ultimately, to a central, national body that gave states a new immediacy in the lives of their citizens.

In most failed states, neither homogenization nor bargaining has happened in a meaningful way. Accordingly, Francis Fukuyama explicitly rejects the term “nation building”: “nation building in the sense of the creation of a community bound together by shared history and culture is well beyond the ability of any outside power to achieve . . . only states can be deliberately constructed. If a nation arises from this, it is more a matter of luck than design” (Fukuyama 2004a, p. 99).

Fukuyama’s call for state building begs two questions, then: first, can a cohesive state be built where there is no nation? Second, can outside powers implant the institutions of statehood and form a country without the homogenization and bargaining processes having first taken place?

Iraq is a disheartening indication that state building is both more difficult and of limited utility without the preexistence or building of a nation. As President Bush remarked on *al Arabiya* in 2005, “the future of Iraq depends on Iraqi nationalism and the Iraq character – the character of Iraq and Iraqi people emerging” (Bush 2005).

In addition to the nation/state dilemma there is the problem of costs. Assuming the reader is unconvinced by our arguments that the “failed state” category is a meaningless construct and that failed states are not inherently threatening, he or she may be inclined to press for state building. It is then important to examine the historical record and attempt to determine what the costs of such a policy would be.

It is of course impossible to determine the cost of any mission beforehand. Historically, however, such operations have been extremely costly and difficult. Fukuyama writes that state building “has been most successful . . . where US forces have remained for generations. We should not get involved to begin with if we are not willing to pay those high costs” (Fukuyama 2004b, p. 162). In a study for the RAND Corporation, James Dobbins and his coauthors attempt to draft a rule of thumb measure for the costs of nation building in a hypothetical scenario involving a country of 5 million people and \$500 per capita GDP (Dobbins et al. 2007, pp. 255–9). For less ambitious missions they calculate the need for 1.6 foreign troops and 0.2 foreign police per 1000 population, and \$1.5 billion per year. In the more ambitious scenarios, they figure 13 foreign troops and 1.6 foreign police per 1000 population, and \$15.6 billion per year (Dobbins 2007, pp. 256–7). Curiously, though, Dobbins et al. simply compose average figures from eight historical nation building missions, six of which they code as producing at best mixed results (Dobbins et al. 2003, p. xix). It is unclear why future missions should be based on historical experience when three-quarters of the missions have failed at least partly to reach their objectives.

Moreover, as David Kilcullen observes in the context of counterinsurgency, a corps of state builders should be available to stay in the country indefinitely. Kilcullen proposes that “key personnel (commanders, ambassadors, political staffs, aid mission chiefs, key advisers and intelligence officers) in a counterinsurgency campaign should be there ‘for the duration’” (Kilcullen 2009, p. 266). But it is unlikely that Western governments possess large pools of workers willing and well-equipped to deploy to Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Haiti “for the duration.” Because of American nationalism and the central role of the military in the Iraq example, the command in that country has managed to hold together. But Western civil services – and even most, if not all, Western militaries – are not comprised of a separate class of citizens who

live their lives in far-flung locales, away from family and country, indefinitely. As will be seen below, the actual changes in the US national security bureaucracy have been wholly inadequate to performing these tasks well.

19.2.1 Counterinsurgency and State Building: the US Military's Response to the Failed State Consensus

Despite the flaws in the theory and empirics underlying research on failed states, the US military has made significant changes to its doctrine in order to protect the United States from the threat posed by the alleged state failure/terrorism nexus. In particular, two new field manuals are rooted in the idea that in order to protect the country against terrorism, Washington will have to create effective governments in other countries.

The release in late 2006 of Field Manual 3-24, the US Army and Marine Corps' manual for waging counterinsurgency, was greeted with a fanfare typically reserved for Harry Potter novels. After being downloaded 1.5 million times within the first month from the Fort Leavenworth and Marine Corps websites, the manual was published by the University of Chicago Press, and reviewed by *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* where it was given an editors' choice award.

The interest is understandable. As field manuals go it is a page-turner. The writing team went out of its way to transcend the typically bland prose, and also reached out to civilian experts on matters of substance. Georgetown University professor Colin Kahl called the new field manual "the single best distillation of current knowledge about irregular warfare" (Kahl 2007, p. 171). Yale University's Stathis Kalyvas described the sweep and breadth of the document, noting that the manual was rooted in "a strategy of competitive state building combining targeted, selective violence and population control, on the one hand, with the dissemination of a credible mass ideology, the creation of modern state structures, the imposition of the rule of law, and the spurring of economic development, on the other" (Kalyvas 2008, p. 351).

The Army released FM 3-07, "Stability Operations," two years later. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell, IV, the commander of the US Army's Combined Arms Center, called the new manual "a roadmap from conflict to peace, a practical guidebook" that "institutionalizes the hard-won lessons of the past while charting a path for tomorrow." Perhaps anticipating public skepticism toward a repeat of recent wars, Gen. Caldwell predicted:

America's future abroad is unlikely to resemble Afghanistan or Iraq, where we grapple with the burden of nation-building under fire. Instead, we will work

through and with the community of nations to defeat insurgency, assist fragile states, and provide vital humanitarian aid to the suffering. (Caldwell 2008)

The assumptions underlying these doctrinal developments are consonant with the emerging nation-building consensus in Washington. The Stability Operations field manual asserts, for example, that “the greatest threat to our national security comes not in the form of terrorism or ambitious powers, but from fragile states either unable or unwilling to provide for the most basic needs of their people” (US Army, p. vi). Senior military officers have taken their cues from civilian opinion leaders who contend that the US Government must improve its capacity for nation building.

As the lead authors of the COIN manual noted in *Military Review* “America’s extraordinary conventional military power makes it likely that many of our future opponents will choose irregular means, including terrorism and insurgency, to achieve their political objectives and prevent us from achieving ours” (Cohen et al. 2006, p. 53). Accordingly, it is not surprising that military leaders are taking steps to prepare for waging counterinsurgency and post-conflict stabilization missions. Department of Defense Directive 3000.05 declares that “stability operations are a core US military mission” for the Department of Defense that “shall be given priority comparable to combat operations” (USDOD 2005). The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review adopted similar assumptions.

19.2.2 Other US Government Agencies’ Responses

In July 2004, with American policy elites reeling from the chaos in Iraq, the US State Department established a dedicated state-building office, the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS). As the Congressional Research Service noted at the time,

For many analysts and policymakers, the ongoing Iraq operation illustrates a US government need for new planning and coordination arrangements that would provide a leadership role for civilians in post-conflict phases of military operations and new civilian capabilities to augment and relieve the military as soon as possible (Serafino and Weiss 2005).

Over time, however, it became clear that the fledgling office had neither the capacity nor the desire to take ownership of the Iraq project. Carlos Pascual, the first director of S/CRS, made clear that the office would have been “overwhelmed” by the demands of Iraq or Afghanistan, and they sought instead simply to “learn from those missions” (Chandrasekaran 2007). Subsequently, the office began forming contingency plans for

Sudan, Liberia, Haiti and other unrelated countries (Logan and Preble 2006, p. 22).

Over time, however, the office began to receive greater funding. The Obama administration's FY 2010 budget request included \$323.3 million for the Civilian Stabilization Initiative (CSI), a nearly nine-fold increase over the Bush administration's budget for FY 2009. Obama's request included more than \$200 million to expand the Civilian Response Corps (CRC), and nearly \$25 million to add new positions and staff in Washington for CSI and S/CRS (Serafino 2009, pp. 16–17). Congress appears eager to support the Obama administration's request.

The administration envisions a 4250 member corps, including 250 active members, plus another 2000 standby component members and 2000 in a reserve status. CRC cuts across at least eight federal government agencies, including State, Justice, Treasury, Commerce, Agriculture, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services and USAID (S/CRS 2009).

As the above numbers indicate, the US Government's state-building activities are still decidedly limited. As with the Bush administration, S/CRS is playing only a very minor role in Iraq and Afghanistan. An S/CRS team deployed to coordinate the US Government support for the Afghan presidential elections in August 2009, and has provided modest support for similar activities in Iraq. Excepting these missions, the office's activities have been limited to planning exercises and coordinating financial support in places such as Haiti, Congo and Bangladesh.

Similar gaps bedevil the US efforts to deploy so-called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite forceful national-security appeals for Americans to join PRTs in those countries (Obama 2009), the results have been unimpressive. As of 2008, in the 12 US-led PRTs in Afghanistan, 34 of the 1055 personnel came from civilian agencies. In Iraq in 2008 the situation was somewhat better: roughly 450 Americans were serving in the 28 US-led PRTs, 360 of whom were from civilian agencies (US GAO 2008). Still, this result came only after top State Department officials toyed with the ideas of forcing Foreign Service personnel to deploy to Iraq and adopting military rather than diplomatic security standards governing their deployments (Kessler 2007a, 2007b). These proposals encountered significant resistance within the State Department, indicating an apparent institutional rigidity likely to hinder any effort to develop a workable and sizeable corps of nation-builders. While it is true that "by the turn of the twenty-first century the United States military had already appropriated the entire earth, and was ready to flood the most obscure areas of it with troops at a moment's notice," (Kaplan 2005, p. 3) the same cannot be said of the civil service.

19.3 RESISTING THE SIREN CALL OF IMPROVEMENT

Too frequently, Western analysts jump to conclusions about the security implications of this or that phenomenon. State failure is a hopelessly broad analytical concept and much of the theorizing on failed states and their supposed relevance to national security cannot withstand empirical scrutiny. By representing failed states as threats that we are ill-equipped to protect against, we convince ourselves of a false vulnerability. Put differently, “to say that militarily strong states are feeble because they cannot easily bring order to minor states is like saying that a pneumatic hammer is weak because it is not suitable for drilling decayed teeth” (Waltz 1979, p. 189).

The failed state debate is only one example of this phenomenon. Part of the reason that everything tends to become a security concern in Western capitals – particularly in Washington – is because publics tend, reasonably, to care most about foreign policy issues that have the potential to affect their lives in some way. Accordingly, for those tasks in which policymakers are interested but publics are not, framing the proposed problem as a threat becomes useful. But acknowledging that state failure poses no serious threat does not in itself preclude attempting to provide assistance to various governments or peoples in trouble.

Simple honesty would require just calling such policies what they are: philanthropy. And, as Barry Posen has observed, the injection of the military element complicates the philanthropic urge:

When the United States is about to engage in armed philanthropy, it should not disguise the effort as the pursuit of a security interest. If the latter is required to sell the policy, then the policy is already in trouble. Once characterized as a security interest, the US Congress and the public expect that the United States will lead the fight; that decisive military means will be employed; and that victory will be achieved – all of which raises US military and political costs (Posen 2007).

As Stewart Patrick notes, “clear-headed analysis” could “help restrain the worst impulses of Northern governments” (Patrick 2007, p. 659). But there has been too little clear-headed analysis, and little restraint.

The reader may note a severe disconnect between the analytical judgments of scholars and policymakers regarding state failure and the resources that have been allocated to addressing the matter. Given the extraordinary expense and difficulty involved in building functional states, how do the resources dedicated to the task hold any promise of fulfilling the mandate of state building? Put differently, if state failure is such

an important threat – Barack Obama tells us that “the safety of people around the world is at stake” (Obama 2009) – then why has there been so little willingness to devote adequate resources to the problem?

We do not have a satisfactory answer to this question, other than to suggest that state failure is obviously not the problem it is made out to be. Still, this leaves another question: why are the claims about state failure repeated with such frequency and vigor? We offer this chapter as a challenge for the proponents of fixing failed states to clarify their logic and to answer to empirics.

What would be more appropriate – and far less costly – than the dramatic changes that would be necessary to form a serious strategy of fixing failed states would be a fundamental rethinking of the role of nation building and the relevance of state failure to national security planning. Thrust forward by the claims of threat, but unequipped with the expensive tools necessary for the task, policymakers look likely to persist in the failed approach to the subject that they have followed in recent years.

NOTES

1. This phrase was the title of Friedrich Hayek’s Nobel Prize Lecture, 11 December 1974.
2. Interestingly, the 2008 Failed States Index produces a significant finding that strong executive constraints make state failure less likely (FSI 2008, p. 69).
3. This heading title refers to the psychological tendency among humans to believe that events beyond their control are, in fact, within it. (Langer 1982)
4. It is important to note that the United States is essentially *sui generis* in terms of state formation. The foundation of the American Republic was at once an ideological crusade and the building of a state and a nation. Some scholars have suggested that the history of the United States has induced American foreign policymakers to believe that the American experience is easily replicable and that this explains the decades-long American infatuation with state or nation building. (Allouche 2008). For an opposing view of nation building in America, see Smith (1999).

REFERENCES

- Allouche, J. (2008), “State-building and US foreign policy”, MIT Center for International Studies, Audit of Conventional Wisdom series, November 2008.
- Baker, P.H. (2005), “Threat convergence and failing states: a new agenda for analysts”, paper presented to The Cornwallis Group X: Analysis for New and Emerging Societal Conflicts, The Canadian Royal Military College, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, March 21–24, 2005, available at http://www.thecornwallisgroup.org/pdf/CX_2005_08-Baker-CX-July22.pdf.
- Bush, G.W. (2002), *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington: The White House.
- Bush, G.W. (2005), “Interview of the President by Al Arabiya Television”, January 26, 2005, transcript available at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/01/print/20050126-7.html>.

- Caldwell, Lt. Gen. W.B., IV (2008), "Foreword", in *Stability Operations Field Manual* (FM 3-07), Washington DC: Headquarters Department of the Army.
- Call, C. (2006), "The fallacy of the 'failed state'", paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, California, March 22, 2006.
- Chandrasekaran, R. (2007), "Iraq rebuilding short on qualified civilians", *Washington Post*, 24 February 2007, p. 1.
- Cohen, E., C. Crane, J. Horvath and J. Nagl (2006), "Principles, imperatives, and paradoxes of counterinsurgency", *Military Review* March/April, 49–53.
- Collier P. (2009), "Development in dangerous places", *Boston Review*, July/August.
- Council on Foreign Relations Task Force (CFR) (2005), *In the Wake of War: Improving US Post-Conflict Capabilities*, July 2005.
- Department for International Development (DFID) (2005), "Why we need to work more effectively in fragile states", January 2005, available at <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/fragilestates-paper.pdf>.
- Dobbins, J., S.G. Jones, K. Crane and B.C. DeGrasse (2007), *The Beginners Guide to Nation Building*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- Dobbins, J., J.G. McGinn, K. Crane, S.G. Jones, R. Lal, A. Rathmell, R.M. Swanger A.R. Timilsina (2003), *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- Economist* (2009), "Fixing a broken world", *Economist*, 31 January 2009, 65–7.
- Fearon J.D. and D.D. Laitin (2004), "Neotrusteeship and the problem of weak states", *International Security* 28 (4) 5–43.
- FSI (2007), "The Failed States Index", *Foreign Policy*, 161, July/August, 54–63.
- FSI (2008), "The Failed States Index", *Foreign Policy*, 167, July/August, 64–73.
- FSI (2009), "The Failed States Index", *Foreign Policy*, 173, July/August, 80–93.
- Fukuyama, F. (2004a), *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (2004b), "Nation Building 101", *Atlantic Monthly* January–February, 159–62.
- Fukuyama, F. (2004c), "Comment on Center for Global Development Task Force Report", *On the Brink: Weak States and US National Security*, available at http://www.cgdev.org/section/initiatives/_archive/weakstates.
- Fukuyama, F. (2005), "'Stateness' first", *Journal of Democracy*, 16 (1) 84–8.
- Ghani, A. and C. Lockhart (2008), *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Goldstone, J.A. (2008), "Pathways to state failure", *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 25 (4) 285–96.
- Gourevitch, A. (2005), "The myth of the failed state", paper presented at the Annual Meeting International Studies Association, March 3, 2005.
- Helman, G.B. and S.R. Ratner (1992–93). "Saving failed states", *Foreign Policy*, 89 (Winter, 1992–1993), 3–20.
- Jones, S.G. (2008), "The rise of Afghanistan's insurgency: state failure and jihad", *International Security*, 32 (4) 7–40.
- Kahl, C.H. (2007), "COIN of the realm: is there a future for counterinsurgency?", *Foreign Affairs*, 86 (6), 169–76.
- Kalyvas, S.N. (2008), "The new US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual as political science and political praxis", *Perspectives on Politics*, 6 (2) 351–3.
- Kaplan, R.D. (2005), *Imperial Grunts*, New York, NY: Random House.
- Kessler, G. (2007a), "Embassy staff in Baghdad inadequate, Rice is told", *Washington Post*, 19 June 2007, A01.
- Kessler, G. (2007b), "Rice orders that diplomatic jobs in Iraq be filled first", *Washington Post*, 21 June 2007, A11.
- Kilcullen, D. (2006), "Twenty-eight articles of company-level counterinsurgency", available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/28articles.pdf>.
- Kilcullen, D. (2009), *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Krasner S.D. (2004), "Sharing sovereignty: new institutions for collapsed and failing states", *International Security*, 29 (2), 85–120.
- Krasner S.D. and C. Pascual (2005), "Addressing state failure", *Foreign Affairs*, 84 (4), 153–63.
- Langer, E. (1982), "The illusion of control", in D. Kahneman, P. Slovic and A Tversky, (eds), *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 231–38.
- Logan, J. and C. Preble (2006), "Failed states and flawed logic: the case against a standing nation-building office", *Cato Policy Analysis*, 560.
- Nagl, J. (2008), "Review of *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War*", *RUSI Journal*, 153 (2), 82–3.
- National Public Radio (NPR) (2004), *Weekend All Things Considered*, 21 March 2004.
- Obama, B. (2007), "Renewing American leadership", *Foreign Affairs*, 86 (4), 2–16.
- Obama, B. (2009), "Remarks by the President on a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," 27 March 2009, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/.
- Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) (2005), *The National Intelligence Strategy of the United States of America*, October 2005, available at <http://www.dni.gov/NISOctober2005.pdf>.
- Patrick, S. (2007), "Failed states and global security: empirical questions and policy dilemmas", *International Studies Review*, 9 (4), 644–62.
- Piazza, J.A. (2008), "Incubators of terror: do failed and failing states promote transnational terrorism?", *International Studies Quarterly*, 52 (3), 469–88.
- Posen, B.R. (2007), "The case for restraint", *The American Interest*, November/December, 7–17.
- Rotberg, R.I. (ed.), (2003), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, Cambridge, MA: World Peace Foundation.
- Scowcroft, B. and S.R. Berger (2005), "In the wake of war: getting serious about nation-building", *National Interest*, Fall, 49–53.
- Serafino, N.M. (2009), "Peacekeeping/ stabilization and conflict transitions: background and congressional Action on Civilian Response Corps and other civilian stabilization and reconstruction capabilities", *CRS Report for Congress, Order Code RL32862*, 16 June 2009.
- Serafino N.M. and M.A. Weiss (2005), "Peacekeeping and conflict transitions: background and congressional action on civilian capabilities", *CRS report for Congress Order Code RL32862*, 13 April 2005.
- Smith, R. (1999), *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III Findings (SFTFR)* (2000), 30 September 2000, available at <http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/SFTF%20Phase%20III%20Report%20Final.pdf>
- Stewart, R. (2009), "The irresistible illusion", *London Review of Books*, 31 (13), available at http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n13/stew01_.html.
- Tilly, C. (1985), "War making and state making as organized crime", in P.B. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer and T. Skocpol (eds), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Tilly, C. (1990), *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- US Army (2008), *Stability Operations Field Manual (FM 3-07)*, Washington DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army.
- US Army and Marine Corps (2006), *Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM 3-24)*, Washington DC: Headquarters, Departments of the Army and Navy.
- US Department of Defense (USDOD) (2005), "Directive 3000.05," November 28, <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/300005p.pdf>.
- US Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) (2009), "President's FY 2010 Budget Request for the Civilian Stabilization

Initiative”, available at <http://www.crs.state.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.display&shortcut=4QJW>.

US Government Accountability Office (USGAO) (2008), “Provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan and Iraq,” GAO-09-86R, 1 October 2008, available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0986r.pdf>.

US Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative (USICI) (2009), *US Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, January 2009, available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf>.

Waltz, K.N. (1979), *Theory of International Politics* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.