

State Fragility, International Development Policy, and Global Responses

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on international development policy responses to fragile and failed states. It offers a historical overview of four generations of responses, examines how state fragility has been defined and measured, discusses the politics of the fragile states label, and summarizes current understandings of how states cycle in and out of fragility. The analysis identifies transnational and country-specific factors that place states at risk. The paper considers pathways that can reduce fragility, noting the limitations of liberal state-building blueprints, and examines the promise of politically informed policy frames that incorporate country context and the agency of local actors. Given the complexity and uncertainty associated with state fragility, coherent global policy responses will remain difficult to achieve.

Key words: fragile states, international development, conflict, violence, state-building, peace-building, resilience

INTRODUCTION

Among the issues on the global policy agenda is maintaining the benefits from the circulation of global “goods” (commodities, trade, finances, people, and so forth) while reducing the risks of the flows of global “bads” (trafficking, illicit weapons, narcotics, terrorism, disease outbreaks, climate change, and so on). Spurred by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, in the United States, the resulting interventions and ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and violent civil strife in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, Western governments have identified failed and fragile states as implicated in the production and circulation of many of these global threats (Fearon and Laitin 2004). Current conventional wisdom considers failed and fragile states, and the poverty, instability, and ungoverned spaces that characterize them, to pose real and significant dangers to the global community (Patrick 2006; Burns, Flournoy, and Lindborg 2016).

This paper examines international development policy, largely centered on the United States, as it relates to states categorized as conflict-affected, fragile, and/or failed where the overall policy objective is to help these countries to move away from conflict, fragility, or failure. What this means practically is subject to ongoing debate. How state fragility and failure have been problematized has had implications for which international actors are called upon to intervene, the scope and nature of the interventions, and the outcomes achieved. US policy makers, their counterparts in other Western nations, and their interlocutors in fragile states are conjoined actors, sometimes willingly, other times not, whose combined commitment and efforts are required to manage the challenges that failure and fragility pose. These actors increasingly recognize the need to develop contextually grounded policy responses to fragile states that take into account how global and country-specific dynamics intersect.

However, Keohane and Nye (1989), describing the complex interdependencies that characterize international relations, disputed the idea of an ordered hierarchy of issue priorities in any policy domain. Societies have multiple connections across borders and pursue varied agendas; states are not unitary actors with a clear set of prioritized interests. In such situations, agenda setting, policy making, and intervention are subject to a range of often conflicting domestic and international pressures. Further, the choices made do not necessarily aggregate to yield a coherent and internally consistent set of priorities, directives, and actions. International development policy directed at failed/fragile states exemplifies these complexities and inconsistencies, as the discussion below reveals.

I begin the paper with a retrospective on successive generations of policy response to failed/fragile states to ground today’s approaches in a historical perspective. Then I turn to definitions of fragile states, and associated measurement frameworks, followed by debates and controversies. My analysis next summarizes the most recent conceptualizations of fragility and of the dynamics that reinforce or mitigate the factors associated with fragility. I review policy responses and intervention strategies that seek to account for sophisticated understandings of transnational as well as state-centric fragility drivers and dynamics. I conclude with mapping pathways out of fragility toward resilience; and, in looking to the future, offer a cautionary note regarding the likelihood of more coherent and coordinated global policy responses to the problem of fragile and conflict-affected states.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND FAILED/FRAGILE STATES

The roots of US international development policy and assistance programs lie in foreign policy decisions made following the conclusion of World War II. These found expression in the Marshall Plan, which supported the rehabilitation of Germany and Japan; and in the creation of the Bretton Woods institutions, which established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. International development as an arena for policy making and intervention was born out of the US desire to reconstruct post-war Europe as a counter to the growing Communist threat posed by the Cold War. This first generation of post-conflict nation-building deemed to be in the national interest set the stage for future policy and associated interventions (Dobbins et al. 2003). The 1950s and 1960s saw a massive wave of new independence for post-colonial countries in the global South, which expanded the geopolitical competition for influence between the West and the Soviet Union beyond Europe. Nation-building targeted poor countries of the so-called Third World (to distinguish it from the first and second worlds: the West and the Communist nations), and aimed to create modern Weberian states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the image of the West (Weber 1946; Brinkerhoff 2008). During this period, the war in Vietnam was a watershed for combined US military and foreign policy objectives that sought societal transformation and modernization to stem the spread of Communism (Picard and Buss 2009). The failure of that endeavor sent ripples through the world's military and foreign policy communities that lasted for decades.

The second generation of post-conflict interventions emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, and focused on humanitarian intervention in countries suffering from political strife, violence, conflict, and instability. The US participated directly in peacekeeping, stabilization, and reconstruction efforts in places such as Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo in cooperation with the United Nations and NATO. It was during this period that the terms *failed*, *failing*, and *fragile* states began to enter the foreign policy lexicon.¹ This generation of interventions saw the mobilization of both military and civilian resources in response to these humanitarian crises. Civilian international development agencies increasingly recognized the need to address the role of violent conflict in pushing countries into crisis and in shaping paths back to stability, and created dedicated units in response. For example, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) established the Office of Transition Initiatives in 1994 and the Office of Conflict Mitigation and Management in 2002. The World Bank created its Post-Conflict Unit in 1997.

The September 11, 2001, attacks in New York and Washington DC launched the third generation of post-conflict policy and intervention, which combined regime change, counterinsurgency, and counter-terrorism in stabilization and reconstruction efforts. The George W. Bush Administration's neoconservative policy of projection of US power swept aside the hesitation to intervene bred by the

¹ Historically, Western powers have been concerned with weak states for many years. For example, the US war in the Philippines in 1899, and its invasion and occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934, were both justified as efforts to stabilize weak states and protect their citizens, as well as to safeguard American interests. European colonialism demonstrated similar justifications, as well as the rationale of bringing the benefits of more “advanced” civilization to populations living in “barbaric” and “primitive” societies.

Vietnam “quagmire.” In Iraq and Afghanistan, the US-led coalition placed the military in the lead role in nation-building, dwarfing the civilian agencies, which struggled to take their seat at the three-D (defense–development–diplomacy) policy table in the face of the resource imbalances. The US (and European) international policy debates shifted away from a major focus on the humanitarian danger that failed/fragile states posed to their own citizens to include the security menaces they created beyond their borders for their neighbors and for the West. Strategies and metrics for international development were strongly propelled by concerns for national and global security, which competed with humanitarian rationales (Duffield 2001). The US remained the dominant actor, but Western policy responses more systematically included transnational collaborations.

Today, a fourth generation of conflict-sensitive international development policy and intervention is emerging, based on a reaction to the misplaced faith (some would say, hubris) in the tenets of third-generation nation-building. This generation involves increased recognition of the transnational nature of the forces influencing state failure and fragility, and the rise of non-state actors as drivers of conflict, violence, and instability. Security remains a high priority on the policy agenda, and in some cases competes with humanitarian concerns. The current worldwide refugee crisis and a spate of terrorist incidents in Europe, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and the US are drivers pushing the primacy of the security agenda. As a policy objective, nation-building has fallen from favor in light of the cautionary lessons of failed transformations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, and the recognition of the limits of external actors’ influence. US policy toward fragile states aims more at containment and mitigation rather than transformation, with deep divisions within the various foreign and domestic policy communities regarding priorities and ways forward.

While the individual country-to-country focus that reflects international relations in the global system remains the basic modality for bilateral engagement, current policy perspectives look beyond the borders of individual fragile states to transnational drivers of fragility. Responses to these transnational drivers are themselves more firmly grounded in transnational policy perspectives that engage multiple partners drawn from the three-D communities of both advanced and developing countries. For example, in West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, and the United Nations, plus the diplomatic and military arms of France, the US, the United Kingdom (UK), and ECOWAS members have intervened jointly in various combinations to seek an end to violent conflicts and civil strife in the region (Annan, 2014). These present-day viewpoints and interventions reflect evolving understandings of the multiple meanings of fragility (and of its posited polar opposite, resilience) and of the local and transnational dynamics that exacerbate or mitigate fragile situations.

CONCEPTUALIZING STATE FRAGILITY AND FAILURE

With the emergence of state fragility and failure as a distinct policy and intervention arena, efforts at definition have proliferated. While there is no single widely accepted definition of fragile states, all share a common focus on the inability of a state to fulfill basic functions that respond to the needs and desires of its citizens. Among donor definitions are the following, which illustrate both the parallels and the variation in this common perspective.

USAID's definition focuses on vulnerability and crisis. States vulnerable to becoming fragile are "those states unable or unwilling to adequately assure the provision of security and basic services to significant portions of their populations and where the legitimacy of the government is in question" (2005, 1). States in crisis are "those states where the central government does not exert effective control over its own territory or is unable or unwilling to assure the provision of vital services to significant parts of its territory, where legitimacy of the government is weak or nonexistent, and where violent conflict is a reality or a great risk" (USAID 2005, 1).

The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) defines fragile states as "those where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor. The most important functions of the state for poverty reduction are territorial control, safety and security, capacity to manage public resources, delivery of basic services, and the ability to protect and support the ways in which the poorest people sustain themselves" (DFID 2005, p. 7). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) definition is close to that of DFID: "States are fragile when state structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations" (OECD Development Assistance Committee [DAC] 2007, 2).

While these definitions provided a general picture of state fragility and its extreme form, state failure, policy makers were keen to develop better understandings of causality, to be able to track changes in fragility over time and compare countries with each other, and to avert crises by recognizing warning signs of deterioration. To respond to these needs, academics, donor agencies, and practitioners developed a variety of analytic frameworks and measurement instruments. These efforts led to several indexes and taxonomies.

Among the most widely used indexes is one that predates the concern with measuring fragility, having been initiated in the mid-1970s as a tool for determining country reform needs and allocation of loans and assistance. This is the World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA), which rates the quality of a country's policies and institutions in four areas: economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion and equity, and public sector management. In 2002, the Bank established cutoff scores below which countries were categorized as fragile (or in Bank terminology at the time, Low Income Countries Under Stress—LICUS). The CPIA methodology and indicators have been refined over the years, and since the Bank made its scores public in 2006, the CPIA ratings have been used by other donors and by analysts in their own determinations of country performance and fragility.

Another frequently cited set of metrics is the Fragile States Index, launched in 2005 by the Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy* magazine. This index is calculated annually for 178 countries based on 12 categories of indicators: demographic pressures, refugees and internally displaced persons, uneven economic development, group grievance, human flight and brain drain, poverty and economic decline, state legitimacy, public services, human rights and rule of law, security apparatus, factionalized elites, and external intervention (Fund for Peace 2015). With the accumulated scorings over the years since 2005, a key focus of the Fund for Peace's annual report is changes in relative rankings over time, either for the better or for the worse. Other examples of efforts to measure and monitor state fragility include Carleton

University's Country Indicators for Foreign Policy, funded by the Canadian Government (Carment, Prest, and Samy 2010); and the Brookings Institution's Index of State Weakness in the Developing World (Rice and Patrick 2008).

WHAT'S IN A LABEL? DEBATES AND CONTROVERSIES

The labeling of states as fragile or failed has been criticized from a number of perspectives (Di John 2010). The first criticism is that the terminology is analytically flawed, for a host of reasons. Among those frequently cited are: It is imprecise and subjective, lacks analytic rigor, conveys a pejorative "blame-the-victim" judgment, conceals the vast variation and uniqueness in countries beneath a homogenizing set of categories, and encourages simplistic and one-size-fits-all solutions to fragility issues (Call 2008). Relatedly, the methodologies used to construct the various indexes and measures of fragility are similarly condemned as subject to various weaknesses and flaws. Frequently mentioned methodological complaints include the following:

- ◆ Analytic frameworks combine indicators within categories to reach summative scores that disguise the variation in performance of individual countries.
- ◆ The use of universal indicators decontextualizes country experience and ignores historical circumstances and influences.
- ◆ Many of the indicator ratings in the indexes rely upon expert judgments, and are therefore subject to individual interpretation and bias.
- ◆ The scoring methodologies create artificial and arbitrary categories of fragility that encourage false assumptions that countries included in the same category share comparable problems that can be solved with similar interventions.

The second criticism is that the label is normative and ideological. Underlying the terminology, according to this criticism, is the notion that what makes states fragile is the dearth of features that characterize the Western ideal of a Weberian bureaucratic state as the desired institutional architecture for socioeconomic development (Lemay-Hébert 2013). These critics contend that the aim of peacebuilding and reconstruction interventions in fragile or failed states is to put in place liberal democratic institutions and processes that replicate Western models and—as noted below—reinforce existing global power relations (Pugh 2005). Further, the specialists who focus on analysis and measurement of fragility and fragile states share a common perspective on the problem, and a common vocabulary, which reinforces a viewpoint that privileges replication of both the Weberian ideal and the science underlying it. As Nay (2014) argued, transnational networks of policy analysts, academics, consultants, activists, and practitioners replicate and spread these normative visions of the fragile states problem and its solutions, thereby strengthening their dominance and authority. The measurement metrics enforce these norms to the extent that various actors use them for monitoring and policy decisions.

The third criticism is that, beyond being simply normative, the label and its associated frameworks and measures are inherently political and serve the dominant interests of the global North. The power and resources of Western governments and of international organizations such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the United Nations lie behind the label and the indexes, translating rankings and

categorizations into resource allocations, technical assistance, and—under certain circumstances—military intervention. The science-based authority of indicators-based models of state fragility that Nay (2014) describes serves to buttress the hegemony of the Northern foreign policy and international development communities in their relations with poor countries. Countries deemed fragile or failed have little choice but to accept the labels and ratings applied to them, and given their “pathologized” incapacities, intervenors from the global North are empowered to administer remedies (Hughes and Pupavac 2005).

However, in some cases, the dependency and helplessness of fragile states mask an ability of actors in those countries to “game” donor relationships to their advantage in ways that are not always apparent (Brinkerhoff 2014). Further, some changes in North-South relations between donors and recipient countries represent shifts toward a more egalitarian assistance partnership. These have emerged from the series of High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness, beginning in Paris and more recently in Busan. The 2011 Busan New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States led to the creation of the so-called G7+ group of fragile and conflict-affected countries, which has spearheaded a global effort to counter Northern domination regarding international development policy and assistance directed at fragile states. The G7+ is part of a larger International Dialogue, co-led by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development of Sierra Leone and Sweden’s Minister for International Development Cooperation, with a secretariat hosted by the OECD, which supports implementation of the New Deal.²

While most observers agree that the changes in power relations are modest, such transnational forums are slowly modifying the policy dialogue and terms of engagement between donor agencies and their governments, and officials in poor countries. One sign of this change has been a decrease in the use of the fragile states label, and its replacement by “countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations.” The term *resilience* emerged several years ago as an addition to the lexicon and to the conceptualization of the dynamics of fragility. In essence, as indicated earlier, resilience is posited as fragility’s opposite (Martin-Breen and Anderies 2011; OECD/DAC 2008). As the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) become the transnational policy framework for the post-2015 future, the international development community’s conception of fragility has taken on a universal character, and is seen as something that can affect all countries around the world, not just those in the global South (OECD/DAC 2015). To some extent, then, the derogatory “sting” in the label is diminishing in tandem with shifts in the policy paradigm.

BEHIND THE LABEL: UNPACKING FRAGILITY

In light of the global threats to which fragile states are perceived to contribute, urgent questions revolve around better understanding the causes and consequences of fragility, and identifying how its effects can be predicted, mitigated, or reversed. An extensive academic and applied literature has emerged in response, offering various explanations of how and why states become fragile and/or fail, and suggesting options to reduce or avoid fragility, avert failure, and restore or rebuild states in crisis

² See the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding website managed by the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), <http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/en/id/about-international-dialogue/>.

(Di John 2010; Gisselquist 2014, 2015). This section reviews the main analytic streams in this literature. These streams have significant areas of overlap, although for presentation purposes their distinctiveness is highlighted here.

One dominant stream, where much comparative econometric analysis has been undertaken, identifies the links between economic dependence on natural resources and risks of intrastate conflict, violence, and crisis. These studies find that countries that are highly dependent upon natural resources and “lootables” (minerals and precious stones) are especially prone to these risks (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Ross 2004). This work has identified greed and grievance as major explanatory factors. The relatively easy availability of natural resources motivates greedy state actors to capture economic rents to maintain power, and anti-state actors to seek rents to finance rebellion. Grievance factors derive from economic and social exclusion, ethnic/religious hatred and dominance, repression, and inequality (Brinkerhoff 2011).

A second stream focuses on the interactions between the state and society, and the interpenetration between these two domains (Migdal 1988, 2001). Explanations of fragility in this stream emphasize political settlements, elite pacts, neopatrimonialism, and patronage as creating states with innate weaknesses. These include reliance on clientelism, rent-seeking, and corruption as a means of maintaining power and control, and predatory and authoritarian relations with citizens. Such states—which North, Wallis, and Weingast (2012) called limited access orders—have dysfunctional political, economic, and public administration systems that rely on exclusive access to resources and rents controlled by a dominant elite. As Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argued, they are inherently fragile and ultimately sow the seeds of their own destruction.

A subset of this stream in the applied literature looks at state–society relations in terms of the social contract to help to explain why some states are fragile and others are stable. The social contract, the OECD/DAC argues, is a product of three interconnected components (2008, 17):

- ◆ Expectations that citizens have of the state;
- ◆ The state’s capacity to provide services within a secure environment, and to obtain sufficient resources from its population and territory to provide these services; and
- ◆ Political will to direct resources and capacity to meet citizens’ expectations.

When these three components are in harmony—that is, when citizens’ expectations align with state capacity and political will—then state–society relations demonstrate responsiveness and resilience. Resilience leads to stability, not in the static sense of a balance that never changes, but rather, enabling the state to adjust to changed expectations, shifts in capacity, new external conditions, and variations in political will. As Kaplan (2014) pointed out, however, the nature and quality of relations across societal groups (what he called the social covenant) matter as much as the relations between society and the state in establishing conditions conducive to stability and resilience.

A third analytic stream takes a functional approach to explaining fragility that looks at core functions that all societies need in order to survive and prosper, and assesses the extent to which a given country faces deficits in fulfilling them.³ These include (Brinkerhoff 2007, Stewart and Brown 2009):

- ◆ **Authority gaps.** These include failure to provide security and basic protection for citizens and property, and the inability to project authority throughout the state's territory.
- ◆ **Service gaps.** These concern the failure to provide basic services, such as health, education, water, and infrastructure; as well as economic opportunity and well-being for the majority of citizens.
- ◆ **Legitimacy gaps.** Failure here is inability to provide responsive and accountable government, to protect basic rights through some form of justice, or to represent and include all citizens.

This stream connects to the social contract notion in that the core functions concern how states relate to their citizens. Whaites (2008), for example, distinguished between a state's "survival" functions (ability to maintain security, raise revenue, and govern through the rule of law) and "expected" functions (ability to meet citizens' expectations for services, infrastructure, etc.). States whose governments perform poorly in fulfilling these functions (whether survival or expected ones) risk becoming victim to a vicious cycle of diminished capacity and authority, reduced confidence in state institutions, loss of legitimacy in the eyes of some segments of the population, and diminished faith in the social contract (World Bank 2011). The result is increased fragility, and heightened probability of renewed conflict and violence (Goldstone 2008). Analyses here link the quality of governance to fragility. For example, Gisselquist (2014, 10) noted that "the failure of a state to fulfill basic functions may stem both from weaknesses in state institutional capacity and from the characteristics of the regime or the functioning and priorities of the government."

Another stream has focused on answering the how and why of fragility by exploring the relationship between individual countries' degrees and manifestations of fragility and failure and various global threats. Primary among these are terrorist groups, particularly those associated with radical Islamism (Patrick 2006). These are closely followed by transnational criminal networks, dealing in drugs, human trafficking, the trade in small arms, and other illicit commodities (Berdal and Serrano 2002; Duffield 2001). These external sources of stress tend to weaken already feeble institutions in fragile states. For example, police, military, and the judiciary become mired in corruption as a function of the illicit financial flows generated by transnational criminal organizations, which undermines citizens' trust in the state (World Bank 2011). Fragile states are often victims of the "bad neighborhoods" phenomenon. When adjacent states are undergoing violent conflict or civil war, or are home to criminal enterprises, the resulting negative dynamics create spillovers that can increase fragility. Because many fragile states have weak border security, they have difficulty controlling or mitigating these spillovers.

Resource shocks are another transnational source of stressors. Fragile states are often highly dependent upon food imports, so are vulnerable to increases in commodity prices and to shortages (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] of the United Nations 2010). Evidence is growing that demonstrates

³ Functional approaches to analyzing states and government are not new: Max Weber's classic work (1946) is perhaps the most well-known example. See also Rose (1976).

the impact of climate change and environmental shocks (e.g., drought and water scarcities) on increasing pressures on fragile states. For example, Burke et al. (2009) found significant historical links between temperature rise and civil war in Africa, and their climate model suggests a possible 54 percent increase in the incidence of armed conflict on the continent by 2030.

What, then, is today's view of state fragility? Current understandings of what lies behind the fragility label include the following, although there is not universal agreement. First is **recognizing the diverse and multifaceted nature of fragility and its causes**. Fragility cannot be attributed solely (or even chiefly) to the resource curse, outbreaks of violent conflict, lack of economic development and poverty, ethnic tensions, exclusionary institutions, poor governance, failure to fulfill basic functions, or transnational spillovers of one sort or another. All of these elements, in various combinations, are likely to play a role in a particular state's trajectory toward fragility, and if their impacts are unchecked, into failure. In response to this recognition, Grävingsholt, Ziaja, and Kreibbaum (2015) have developed a fragility measurement framework that incorporates its multidimensional character. However, one issue with broader measurement frameworks is that the more indicators that are included, the more difficult it is to distinguish the particularities of fragility from the general conditions associated with poverty and low levels of development

Second, **states are not uniformly fragile or strong**. A state may be critically weak in some aspect of state functioning (or statehood, however conceived), and relatively strong in others. As Carment et al. observed (2010, 17), "few states suffer catastrophic failure in all areas of 'stateness' simultaneously." The OECD/DAC (2015) view referenced above—that all states contain some features that hold risks of fragility—reflects this understanding. Myanmar is a good example: decades-long ethnically based insurrections, but a central authoritarian government capable of exerting control, and recent steps toward partial democratization.

Third, **paths to (and from) fragility and failure are a function of both structural conditions and agency**. While structural and institutional endowments have significant influence, they are not necessarily determinant. Human intentionality and action are important as well. Today's understanding of agency recognizes that actors play important roles in endogenous institutional change, whether in directions that may increase the likelihood of fragility—e.g., by promoting repression—or reduce it—e.g., by fostering inclusion (Mahoney and Thelen 2009). For example, the country cases in Barma, Huybens, and Viñuela (2014) take an agency perspective and detail how country actors were successful in negotiating institutional reforms in fragile states.

PATHWAYS TO REDUCING FRAGILITY

The above review of models that have sought to unpack, measure, and assess fragility offers a broad-brush picture of past and current thinking. That picture understates the diversity of perspectives and the disputes among members of the foreign policy and international development communities regarding fragility, peace-building, and state-building (Paris and Sisk 2009). Both the hypothesized and practical pathways to reducing fragility have been diverse and contested, and the discussion here cannot do justice to the variety and differences. Here I highlight selected themes and arguments that have influenced policy and practice. To oversimplify, the arc of the "story line" on pathways out of fragility is the demise of the

hegemony of liberal peace- and state-building, with its normative, top-down, externally determined, technocratic prescriptions for what the state should do (Chandler and Sisk 2013). In contrast, the shift is toward an evolving hybrid approach, where pathways take a local turn that emphasizes politically infused state–society bargaining—confronting top-down with bottom-up—and leads to situation-specific solutions that are endogenously determined. Through a focus on resilience, this frame recognizes the impacts of global forces beyond individual state boundaries on fragility, while accepting the limits of external intervention, the inherent uncertainty surrounding emergent outcomes, and the primacy of politically driven contestation.

Blueprint routes out of fragility and failure: Liberal state-building dead ends?

Two core principles supported the first three generations of international development policy and post-conflict intervention outlined above. First, the road to achieving development and stability, and to avoiding fragility, lay in poor countries emulating the trajectory of industrial nations and creating a state based on democratic modes of governance (Brinkerhoff 2008). Second, how to reach the destination at the end of that road could be broken down into operational guidelines and linear steps that could be successfully applied across a wide range of individual situations. While this blueprint thinking was most evident in the US military’s approach to stabilization and reconstruction operations, codified in the US Army’s *Stability Operations Field Manual* (2009), it has for years suffused the premises and practices of civilian international development agencies as well, and more recently penetrated so-called “whole of government” approaches to civilian–military collaboration in post-conflict intervention (Brinkerhoff 2008; OECD/DAC 2006).⁴ While experienced practitioners undertook adaptations on the ground to match the particularities of a given fragile situation and informally recognized local political dynamics, the universality of the liberal Weberian state “under construction” with external assistance remained unquestioned (Lemay-Hébert 2009, 2013). The result on the ground was often the creation of government institutions that resembled in form their lookalikes in developed countries, but lacked the actual fulfillment of their espoused mandates and were bereft of the societal embeddedness that accorded them legitimacy, a condition referred to as “isomorphic mimicry” (Andrews 2013).

As the preceding discussion of the fragility label noted, a rising chorus of criticism from practitioners, analysts, and researchers challenged liberal peace- and state-building on conceptual and operational grounds. As Iraq’s and Afghanistan’s stabilization and reconstruction blueprints failed to create stable, well-functioning states, the appetite of the US and its allies for long-term, resource-intensive societal transformations waned. Policy makers and academics rethought the pathways out of fragility and the means to pursue them. Besides the top-down linear reductionism inherent in their design and implementation, the flaws of blueprints, in the eyes of most critics, resulted from narrowly focusing on formal government structures and process, favoring technocratic solutions while disregarding political realities, ignoring the importance of local informal practices and institutions, and overestimating the

⁴ The debate regarding blueprinting fragile states interventions has replicated the ongoing conversation among international development specialists about the extent to which foreign assistance can successfully be delivered in preprogrammed projects. An early discussion of this topic can be found in Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989); the latest terminology in the debate refers to problem-driven iterative adaptation as an alternative to international development assistance blueprints (Andrews 2013).

capacity of external actors to exert influence to achieve their aims (for example, Booth 2012; Brinkerhoff 2008, 2011; Chandler 2013).

Beyond state-building blueprints?

What policy and operational frameworks for reducing fragility have emerged that go beyond universal blueprints? Both the World Bank and the OECD's Development Assistance Committee have offered conceptualizations and guidance that inform the fourth generation of policy and intervention in conflict-affected states sketched above. The World Bank's 2011 World Development Report (WDR) delineated a dynamic pathway out of fragility that targets building resilience to violence and conflict through successive iterations of restoring confidence, followed by transforming institutions. The model is visualized as a spiral of multiple transitions where, "as one set of immediate priorities is resolved, other risks and transition moments emerge and require a repeated cycle of action to bolster institutional resiliency" (World Bank 2011, 103). Critical steps to bring countries "back from the brink" of fragility/failure include restoring confidence in key institutions via building broadly inclusive coalitions of state and non-state actors, and "getting the basics right" by providing citizen security, justice, and jobs. The WDR cited South Korea and Ghana as historical examples of countries that followed this pathway, and noted the rebuilding efforts undertaken in Indonesia's post-conflict Aceh region as a recent case.

The OECD has offered a related framing to assess fragility that incorporates variation in individual country situations through the visual image of a Venn diagram with five overlapping fragility clusters (OECD/DAC 2015). The clusters specify intervention targets for each: violence reduction; promotion of justice and rule of law; effective, accountable, and transparent institutions; increased resilience; and renewed or strengthened economic foundations that focus on inclusion and youth. The clusters model links to the United Nations' SDGs for 2030 in specifying how each of the fragility clusters poses risks for countries achieving the goals.

Both of these frameworks go beyond blueprints in that they take country-specific political, social, and institutional factors into account. In the case of the World Bank's spiral, these contextual factors drive the iterative transitions, subject to global influences, positive and negative. In the OECD/DAC model, these factors influence the prominence of one cluster over the others, which creates identifiable fragility patterns. Neither framework prescribes a standard sequence of actions or interventions to be applied in all situations, and opts for attention to context as the determinant of what international donors can and should do to support country actors in reducing fragility. Located beyond blueprints, then, is a menu of strategies and associated interventions, where what to choose relies upon features of the particular context. Gisselquist (2015) pointed out that paying attention to context does not mean treating each country's context as unique. She argued that contextual factors affecting aid effectiveness can be categorized, which provides guidance for choosing policies from the menu.

This menu, however, includes many items that figured in earlier blueprints. For example, the institutional and governance reforms that the World Bank (2011) has promoted as helpful in moving countries along the spiral away from violence and toward resilience are firmly grounded in Weberian principles. Thus, the extent to which current policy and practice has moved beyond reductionist blueprints remains contested, as the ongoing debates on liberal peace- and state-building summarized above reveal.

An evolving stream of investigation and discussion in international development policy and academic circles concerns the application of systems thinking as a way to move beyond reductionism and the inherent linearity that lies behind blueprinting. Ramalingam, Jones, Reba, and Young (2008) explored how systems concepts can be applied to international development and humanitarian aid, focusing on complex adaptive systems, which exhibit unpredictability, nonlinearity, emergence, adaptation, and self-organized learning. These applications lead peace- and state-builders in new directions. Instead of context being simply the starting point for deciding upon where external interventions will be effective, a complexity-informed perspective sees that reducing fragility and building resilience can emerge only from the dynamics of the context itself, where local actors and institutions interact and self-organize to solve problems. If international donors intervene too much, they interrupt the feedback and learning processes in the local system. As de Coning (2016, 10) argued, “the result is a missed opportunity to contribute to the development of self-organisation and resilience; such interruptions [also] build dependency.”

The jury is out on whether international development policy and practice, as applied to both fragile states and elsewhere, can meaningfully take on systems thinking. Pessimists argue that the political economy of Northern donors, in particular the need to demonstrate results and account for funds, militates against abandoning the primacy of liberal interventionism in favor of nonlinear strategies that privilege local actors, local ownership, and emergent processes where outcomes are contingent and uncertain (Chandler 2013, 2014; Pugh 2005). Cautious optimists point to the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, and the creation of the G7+ and the International Dialogue, along with the SDG process as signs of a new transnational architecture of North–South engagement that will lead to shifts in development cooperation and intervention in fragile and stable states (Manuel 2014; OECD/DAC 2015; Whaites 2016).

In between are what might be termed hopeful skeptics, who document lessons learned and experimentation with approaches and tools that have potential for better cooperation and outcomes while acknowledging the barriers, both internal to the agencies involved and transnational (Andrews 2013; Brinkerhoff 2014; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2015; Gisselquist 2014, 2015; Rocha Menocal 2013). These sources align in arguing for politically informed problem-solving approaches that privilege local agency while recognizing that donor–fragile state relations inevitably involve top-down dynamics, and that international development agencies continue to have difficulty in dealing effectively with politics (Booth 2012).

LOOKING FORWARD

The international development architecture that emerged to support the Millennium Development Goals, and now the SDGs, has integrated reducing fragility and building resilience into these global targets and related indicators.⁵ However, despite the new SDG platform, achieving a coordinated global response to fragile states is problematic, and likely to remain so. As the discussion in this paper has shown, the debates on defining and categorizing fragility continue, as do arguments on how best to assist

⁵ SDG 16 directly reflects the lessons of the past regarding the importance of effective institutions. This goal is: “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

poor conflict-affected countries to navigate pathways out of fragility toward resilience. Transnational management of such assistance must confront the policy inconsistencies and cross-purposes that Keohane and Nye (1989) identified as well as the inherent complexity of these pathways. Recent multiactor civilian and military interventions in West African conflict-affected countries, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Mali, are a case in point (Annan 2014).

Because fragile states constitute a wicked problem set, no single policy perspective, or associated intervention strategy, will successfully address the transnational challenges that fragile and failed states pose (Brinkerhoff 2014). The emergence of new international development donors, China in particular, introduces additional complexity into global responses. In practice, the priorities of the more prominent voices at the policy table are the ones that will most likely prevail. Especially since September 11, 2001, the strongest and most well-resourced voices in the US and Europe have been the security community and the military. Combining objectives that address the situation-specific particularities of fragility in a given country with the global goals of maintaining security and stability (countering the impacts of global “bads”) risks relegating the development and resilience objectives to second-class status in the event of perceived or actual conflicts and trade-offs between the two. Resilience itself has become increasingly defined and operationalized within a national security policy framework (Fjäder 2014).

While the security agenda remains paramount, both military and civilian members of the US and European foreign policy communities recognize that effectively confronting the challenges of fragile states will mean looking beyond short-term security and stabilization to address the root dynamics that contribute to state fragility. The report of the Fragility Study Group is one recent example of rethinking policies focused on fragile states that seeks to incorporate the research and practical lessons summarized above (Burns et al. 2016). The report proposes a policy framework with four key principles: (1) be strategic (prevent or mitigate future crises, address trade-offs, strengthen international partnerships), (2) be selective (align interests with local actors and aspirations, apply leverage to motivate locally driven change, recognize and build on complementarities among partners), (3) think systemically (address security, politics, and capacity issues as interconnected; be sensitive to unintended consequences; adapt), and (4) sustain effort over time (keep plans and objectives realistic, avoid intervening too late and leaving too early, build on successes). The authors recommend applying these principles in three policy arenas to develop shared agreements: domestically, within the US government; transnationally, among regional and global partners; and locally, in the fragile state where intervention is intended or under way.

In light of the complex interdependencies and conflicting policy priorities that Keohane and Nye (1989) detail, as well as the bureaucratic and operational barriers that the other studies cited here document, the prospects for successfully navigating these arenas are daunting. The forces that have contributed to state fragility will endure around the globe for the foreseeable future, and will require concerted, long-term efforts by national, transnational, and local actors. Policy frameworks such as the one proposed by the Fragility Study Group may offer potential avenues to shape formal interactions among these actors. However, informal connections, particularly channels that link nonstate actors at all three levels, need to be recognized as an important factor in mobilizing and maintaining effective commitments and action to confront state fragility.

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