U.S. Army (David Bedard)

Inauguration of President Obama raised expectations of earlier and smarter intervention to protect civilians from dangers of fragile and failing states

Forging a U.S. Policy Toward Fragile States

BY PAULINE H. BAKER

Responding to 21st-century Security Challenges

Except in high profile crisis situations, Washington rarely attempts to develop an integrated, government-wide strategy to prevent conflict and state failure, in which the National Security Council sets overall objectives and figures out how to bring relevant tools of influence to bear in the service of unified country strategies. More commonly, the United States engages individual fragile and failing states in a haphazard and "stove-piped" manner, pursuing separate bilateral diplomatic, aid, defense, trade, and financial relationships, each reflecting the institutional mandates and bureaucratic priorities of the relevant agencies. The United States needs to rationalize and upgrade its fragmented approach to monitor precarious states and develop new mechanisms to improve the chance that early warning actually triggers early action.

—Stewart Patrick, "The U.S. Response to Precarious States: Tentative Progress and Remaining Obstacles to Coherence"[1]

Pauline H. Baker is President of The Fund for Peace, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC.

Of the many foreign policy challenges of the 21st century, one of the most complex and unpredictable is the problem of fragile and failing states, which often leads to civil war, mass atrocities, economic decline, and destabilization of other countries. The political era stemming from such challenges not only threatens civilians who are in harm's way, but also endangers international peace. Since the 1990s, such crises have become more prominent on the agendas of the major powers, intergovernmental institutions, humanitarian organizations, and vulnerable states themselves. Indeed, while the number of violent conflicts, particularly interstate wars, declined after the end of the Cold War, the duration and lethality of internal conflicts are rising. Casualty figures are considerably higher when "war deaths" beyond the battlefield and deaths resulting from infrastructure destruction are included.[2] While Iraq and Afghanistan have dominated the public discourse on fragile states, the problem is not confined to these countries or their neighbors. Indeed, it is likely that global trends in civil conflicts will present more, not fewer, challenges to international peace and security, particularly in states where there is a history of instability, demographic pressures, rich mineral resources, questionable political legitimacy, a youth bulge, economic inequality, factionalized elites, and deep-seated group grievances.

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Yet for all the talk of the critical importance of such challenges, the U.S. Government lacks a comprehensive strategy and overall set of objectives to prevent state failure and to strengthen weak states. While many U.S. agencies are engaged in activities related to state fragility, their efforts are typically fragmented into different priorities, goals, and frameworks.[3] In sum, the terminology of conflict risk varies; the metrics of successful interventions are not uniform; and operational functions are usually divided into pre- and postconflict phases, with analysts rarely looking at the full life cycle of a conflict. Despite the fact that weak and failing states were identified in the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy as a high priority threat, the National Security Council (NSC) does not have a directorate dedicated to coordinating and supervising an integrated approach to fragile states; rather, it tucks issues related to weak states under other categories, such as development, humanitarian affairs, stabilization, or democratization. This means the focus is diluted, agencies are left to decide how to approach the challenges in their own ways, and no strategy or unified approach has been developed. In essence, we make it up as we go along, country by country and crisis by crisis.

Government specialists dealing with such crises are scattered across different agencies and departments. Early warning analysts reside primarily in the Intelligence Community, although conflict analysis was supposed to have been a function of the Department of State Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS). Instead, its primary function has shifted toward recruiting civilian government workers for deployment in conflict zones. As a result, with no "institutional home" for developing a U.S. strategy for fragile states, there is no shared methodology, conceptual framework, or analytical approach that integrates lessons

learned for interagency unity of effort. Most government efforts are instead directed toward operational functions, linking agencies once they are up and running in the field.

State-building experts tend to be area specialists who reside in the Department of State and in some U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) units (for example, Conflict Mitigation and Management) as well as the Department of Defense (DOD). They focus on postconflict[4] events, such as the Pentagon's focus on military stabilization, or USAID's emphasis on economic reconstruction. Their efforts are valuable, and useful products have resulted, such as the 2005 Essential Tasks Matrix for postconflict reconstruction developed by S/CRS in collaboration with six other agencies. This is an operational tool that categorizes a range of tasks for practitioners on the ground once the decision to intervene is made, but it is no substitute for a comprehensive strategy designed to prevent or mitigate conflict in fragile states.

Counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism efforts present even more complex challenges to U.S. policy in fragile states. Military exigencies in Iraq and Afghanistan have skewed perceptions on fragile states, as operational imperatives have superseded strategic understanding of what must be done for long-term state-building. Sometimes these goals are compatible, sometimes not. For example, to subdue insurgencies, the United States has decided to train, equip, arm, and use local proxy forces or sectarian militias to address COIN needs. While their use is understandable as a short-term military tactic, these militias could present a conflict risk of destabilizing the host government in the long term, becoming spoilers if they are not demobilized or integrated into the state's security structures. Iraq is an example of this phenomenon, with the Sunni Awakening forces feeling marginalized by the Shiite government, which has failed to absorb some 100,000 fighters as promised.

Given the shortage of civilian personnel knowledgeable and available to do state-building, the military has ended up shaping both early warning and state-building policies as well as conducting security and reconstruction operations on the ground. In many ways, the military has stepped up to the plate and boldly taken on the most advanced work: investigating the drivers of violence, deploying to contain the violence, and implementing state-building tasks to avoid a recurrence of violence. The Armed Forces have vastly more resources and are better organized than other agencies, and also have the institutionalized planning and evaluation mechanisms those agencies lack.

However, the results focus on warfighting goals. The emphasis in COIN doctrine on protecting civilians has narrowed the gap between military and civilian needs on the ground, but it remains a gap nonetheless. This merging of functions makes it difficult to measure the results of state-building, establish benchmarks of progress, or institutionalize interagency coordination. The lack of consensus on the metrics of success, in turn, undermines public confidence in the state-building exercise.[5] Except in rare cases of enlightened commanders and policymakers ordering integrated efforts in their particular areas of responsibility, the U.S. response to preventing conflict and building functional states remains incoherent, stovepiped, and uncoordinated.[6]

The current emphasis to remedy this situation is to encourage interagency coordination. But the U.S. policy deficit on

fragile states is due to more than the lack of coordination, or a paucity or imbalance of resources. These are the symptoms, not the cause. Rather, the deficit originates from *a failure to conceptualize the challenge correctly* and to develop a holistic strategy for dealing with the phenomenon of state failure *as a new class of conflict*. Such an approach must be not only whole of government, but also whole of society, or comprehensive, taking into account the entire range of actors who populate the landscape of shattered societies: local authorities, nonstate actors, spoilers, criminal networks, international nongovernmental organizations, illicit economies, the private sector, and communal, religious-, and ethnic-based groupings. Also needed is a unified decision-making structure involving relevant U.S. departments that can not only *act rapidly in a crisis*, but also, even more importantly, *act before a crisis*, using early warning and state-building skills that can be adapted to individual cases. Previous attempts to develop such an approach have either been ignored when new administrations came into office, or they failed to generate sufficient financial and political support to stay afloat.[7]

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The United States needs to make fragile states a higher priority in the hierarchy of national security concerns, comparable to such issues as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), climate change, and energy self-sufficiency. To achieve this, the following steps need to be taken:

- Create a Directorate for Conflict Prevention and Sustainable Security in the NSC with the appropriate staffing, budget, and authority to develop and implement a comprehensive U.S. strategy for fragile states.
- In consultation with Congress, establish criteria for U.S. engagement, or nonengagement, in fragile states, including diplomatic, informational, military, and economic options that can be utilized throughout the full life cycle of a conflict for both prevention and response.
- Form an international coalition of partner organizations and countries that could join the United States in developing strategies, coordinating interventions (nonmilitary and military), and providing resources, including rapid response mechanisms, to ensure that early warning means early action, and to build local institutional capacities for good governance in high-risk states.
- Create a unified U.S. political/military plan embracing all relevant agencies of government that need to be activated when policymakers decide a fragile state should be engaged in an emergency situation in which conflict has broken out, or until a strategy for preventing such an emergency is adopted.
- Conduct regular evaluations in each country in which the United States is engaged in a state-building strategy to measure progress, draw lessons learned, and determine when the country is

confidently on a trajectory toward sustainable security, laying the basis for a gradual exit strategy.

- Formulate a public diplomacy campaign that explains the policy and its rationale to the general public, international community, and the locally affected populations.

How We Got Here

During the early 1990s, the problems of fragile states were seen in the United States mainly as humanitarian tragedies. Indeed, when the U.S. military began to deploy forces in response to outbreaks of violence in internal wars, either to evacuate civilians or to stabilize the situation, they were described as short-term deployments similar to natural disaster responses and called *military operations other than war* (MOOTW). This term conveyed both the low strategic significance attributed to such missions, and a fundamental misunderstanding of what is involved in mitigating the consequences of internal wars and building functioning states.

Attitudes shifted dramatically after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Launched by al Qaeda, which was then based in Afghanistan, the attacks were planned and executed by a terrorist group that, in essence, had taken control of a failed state. It was from the Afghan base that al Qaeda was able to consolidate organizationally, train fighters, and propagate an ideology of religious fundamentalism that rationalizes mass murder.

The main long-term threat comes not merely from the organization but also from the environment that allows it to operate. Of course, extremist groups operate in strong states as well as weak ones, but in the former, there are institutional capacities to limit their movements and activities. Weak and failing states permit extremist groups and predatory elites to thrive largely with impunity.[8] The people who typically suffer most are not the enemies of such elites, but the populations trapped under their control.

Approximately 1 to 2 billion people in roughly one-third of the world's nations (about 60) are estimated to be living in fragile or failing states.[9] They display a variety of dysfunctions, including:

- lack of physical control of their territories
- loss of a monopoly on the use of force
- inability or unwillingness of the governments to protect their own citizens and provide basic social services
- insufficient political legitimacy for leaders to make authoritative decisions for the society as a whole
- inability to function fully and responsibly in the international system.[10]

Power vacuums in such states may be filled by militias, traffickers, criminal groups, drug cartels, and other illicit networks that erode state sovereignty from within.[11] Alternatively, predatory political elites who capture power can drive countries into institutional decay, eroding sovereignty from the top. Though they may have the trappings of "strong states," such states are merely "strongman states" that often collapse when the leadership is removed. In weak or strongman states, stability is a function of the life of the regime, not of the integrity of state institutions.

The international community tends to neglect such threats until they emerge as major crises or become what are usually described as

complex humanitarian emergencies. By that time, they may be too big or too complicated to resolve without military intervention.[12] Such neglect led to Afghanistan being taken over by the Taliban and, by extension, al Qaeda. Likewise, a short-term intervention such as Somalia in 1992–1993 to break a famine turned into combat operations that killed 18 Americans and 1,000 Somalis. It led to a rapid withdrawal of United Nations (UN) and U.S. troops and subsequent neglect of the country. Today, after 14 failed attempts at creating a new government, Somalia remains the quintessential failed state—"the most dangerous place in the world."[13] Among other things, its lawlessness has given rise to an invasion by a neighboring state, U.S. attacks on alleged al Qaeda–linked militants, and booming piracy in the Gulf of Aden, endangering one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world.

Pakistan's possible disintegration represents a scenario that risks nuclear weapons ending up in the hands of al Qaeda or the Taliban

Even more frightening is the prospect of a nuclear-armed state that fails. Pakistan's possible disintegration represents a scenario that risks nuclear weapons ending up in the hands of al Qaeda or the Taliban. North Korea's breakdown could likewise result in nuclear weapons being passed to yet-to-be-determined criminal or predatory warlords. Mexico has become the subject of a new debate over whether it, too, is becoming a failed state as a result of vicious attacks by drug cartels, including a record number of beheadings, kidnappings, and murders against state authorities. The label of "failed state" is probably inappropriate, as Mexico has stronger institutions than is usually recognized. But despite which states are, or are not, included in the category of weak and failing states, the United States is not adequately prepared to deal with these 21st-century threats, wherever they arise.

The frequency and complexity of such crises have gradually transformed MOOTW into a more realistic conception now generally termed *stability operations* or, more recently, *hybrid operations*.[14] The change of nomenclature signifies a dramatic shift in thinking, at least by the military, from an exclusively humanitarian to a more complicated humanitarian/security perspective.

Much has been learned in the interim. Building on the 2002 National Security Strategy, which asserted that "America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones,"[15] the 2008 U.S. Army Field Manual 3–07, *Stability Operations*, states that the "greatest threats to our national security will not come from emerging ambitious states but from nations unable or unwilling to meet the basic needs and aspirations of their people."[16] The idea that state-building rests on the security and well-being of civilian populations rather than the elimination of insurgents or terrorists is a milestone in military thinking, even though there were antecedents in earlier COIN doctrine. This has led to three other major assumptions:

- U.S. stability operations will last longer and claim more of the military's resources than conventional combat operations.
- Such crises will require a military role before, during, and after combat

operations across the full life cycle of the conflict.

- Success (defined as *sustainable security*, not military victory) will depend not only upon military prowess, but also upon "the capacity of the other elements of national power, leveraging the full potential of our interagency partners."[17]

Thus, what has evolved from the challenges of fragile states is a new hybrid form of combat that goes beyond traditional concepts of guerrilla warfare and COIN operations. Now civilian protection is not merely a tactic but a core military objective, and a "civilian surge" for state-building does not merely follow military operations in a postconflict stage, but constitutes a key part of hybrid operations that defines success.[18] Indeed, state-building might be an effective conflict prevention strategy with the potential to avert the need for military intervention in many states if it is begun early enough.

Dramatic changes in nonmilitary thinking are occurring as well. A booming industry has emerged in early warning, with new methodologies, technologies, watch lists, civilian-based alerts, and case studies. An equally intense flood of interest has emerged in postconflict state-building strategies, focusing on the ingredients of reconstruction, such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of militias, humanitarian relief, elections, refugee and internally displaced person resettlement, economic growth, transitional justice, police and military training, civil service support, rule of law, and good governance. Private foundations have allocated funds to spur innovations in these areas, and governments worldwide are exploring how to foster interagency coordination, manage sequencing, measure progress, stimulate economic growth, develop civil society, and "win hearts and minds."

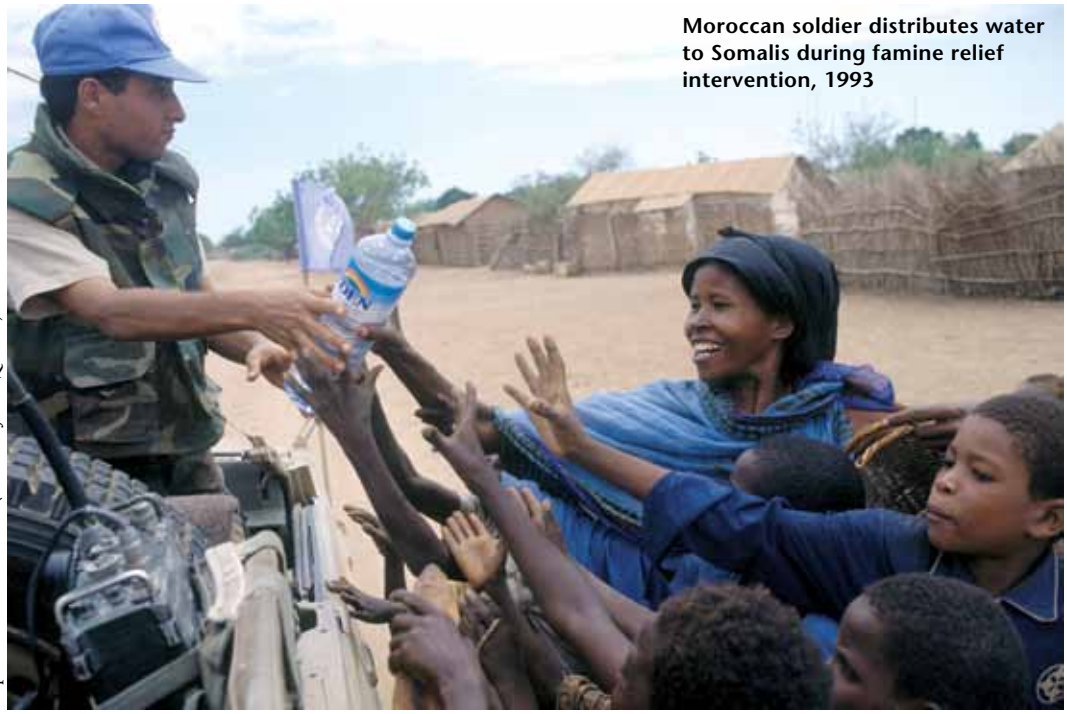
As laudable as this shift is, there remains a lag in government thinking. Because government responses to early warning (which often becomes late warning) are slow, they invariably tilt toward coercive measures based on hard power interventions or threatened sanctions, while state-building relies more heavily on civilian functions, based on soft power assets and incentives. Chester Crocker, a Georgetown University professor and former Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, commented:

> *This isn't about "hard power" versus "soft power." It's about "smart power" that connects the dots between our brains, muscles, and dollars to craft integrated responses to strategy. Without smart power we'll continue to be good at blowing things up, and to struggle with the more complicated mission of winning the peace.*[19]

A Surge or a Slump in Attention?

Some observers have questioned whether systematic early warning is really needed, maintaining that the problem is not a lack of awareness of looming disasters, but a lack of the political will to act. Others have questioned whether a state-building approach is the best path to peace, noting that other political remedies, perhaps at the local level, might be

much has been learned since Vietnam, but the global economic crisis has led some to question whether the degree of progress can be sustained



Department of Defense (LeVern J. McQueen)

Moroccan soldier distributes water to Somalis during famine relief intervention, 1993

preferable, and that state-building is sometimes harmful for peace, as it can cause a revival of violence. For instance, as the debate on Afghanistan illustrated, some argued that our goals should focus only on the terrorist dimension, because truly dedicated state-building would risk drawing us into a prolonged military and political engagement reminiscent of Vietnam. In fact, much has been learned since Vietnam, but the global economic crisis has led some to question whether the degree of progress can be sustained. Niall Ferguson, a history professor at Harvard, argues that the upheavals occurring in weak and failing states are likely to receive reduced resources and attention, despite mounting threats:

> *Most countries are looking inward, grappling with the domestic consequences of the economic crisis and paying little attention to the wider world crises. This is true even of the United States, which is now so preoccupied with its own economic problems that countering global upheaval looks like an expensive luxury.*[20]

On the other hand, while the economic downturn will undoubtedly present constraints, it can also be argued that leaders cannot afford to stand back from a world collapsing around them, especially when their interests are affected by hostile forces that arise in such environments. Moreover, while it may be true that war fatigue is eroding support for long military engagements, other forces are converging for a more active agenda on several issues.

The 2009 inauguration of Barack Obama as President has *raised expectations of American leadership* in this sphere. Obama's administration includes advocates of the agenda, such as Susan

Rice, now U.S. Ambassador to the UN, and Samantha Powers, now on the NSC, both of whom are known to support more robust responses to prevent genocide and mass atrocities and to ensure recovery in war-torn societies.[21] U.S. allies, the nongovernmental organization community, and foreign policy analysts are likewise lobbying for stronger actions to protect civilians in danger. Thus, while there remain substantial limitations (including restricted resources in an economic downturn, war fatigue within the U.S. public, and international distrust of U.S. intervention), expectations of earlier and smarter responses by the United States, especially to protect civilians at risk, are rising. Those expectations were reinforced by the U.S. support for the International Criminal Court indictment of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity, the continuation of sanctions against the regime of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, and engagement in Afghanistan, despite continuing controversies over the right tactics in each case.

There is *increased advocacy from civil society* for action, particularly to prevent genocide and mass atrocities.[22] Many advocacy groups are coalescing and cooperating, suggesting that civil society may be transitioning from country-specific advocacy toward a general antigenocide movement. Their efforts are mirrored in increased attention by leading think tanks, foundations, religious organizations, universities, and celebrities to antigenocide projects.[23] Thus, the constituency seems to be growing for more assertive U.S. action to prevent and mitigate crisis situations, separate from COIN or counterterrorism policies.

Operational military doctrine is changing. Guidelines for COIN operations have likewise changed, placing the protection of civilians, not body counts, as the core measure of progress. Projects funded by DOD to measure the effects of stability operations include metrics on social well-being, economic development, rule of law and governance, and security.[24] Military thinking in many other countries parallels this trend, with state-building becoming a core function of stability operations and development programs.

The *demand for peacekeeping troops* is growing. There were twice as many peacekeeping missions (with more than 5,000 troops) in 2008 than in 2002.[25] The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mission in Afghanistan is requiring more combat troops and economic reconstruction teams. African Union missions in Somalia and Sudan are undermanned and underresourced. Humanitarian aid workers are being attacked and forced to pull out of conflict zones. When aid workers are withdrawn, the need for peacekeeping troops rises.

The UN has *created more mechanisms* to deal with peacekeeping, human rights, genocide, and norms of humanitarian intervention, including the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Mechanisms include a Peacebuilding Commission, a revamped Human Rights Council to replace the Human Rights Commission, an Office of the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide, and the appointment of the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on these matters.[26] The R2P principle is based on the notion that the international community has a responsibility to protect civilians when a state is "manifestly failing" to shield its population from war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity.

The record has not been impressive in *averting mass casualties*. Ever since the

Rwanda genocide in 1994, frustration has mounted in civil society and governments around the world over the tepid responses to mass atrocities, violent conflict, and state decay in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Burma, and Somalia, among others.[27] Nor has there been much progress in diminishing the risk of conflict in a range of other weak states, such as North Korea, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (until President Obama's speech in December 2009), where the dangers include state failure, regional stability, and, in the case of North Korea and Pakistan, nuclear nonproliferation.

Thus, the United States and the international community are confronting a unique paradox: a rising demand for more effective responses to instability precisely at a time when resources to accomplish this goal and domestic support are diminishing. Besides severe economic and political pressures, U.S. policymakers face the internal test of how to overcome haphazard, stovepiped, and fragmented responses that we have in current operations.

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It is possible that both sets of problems may be addressed simultaneously, as policymakers struggle over how to do more with less. Economic constraints could drive the kind of efficiencies that have been needed all along. They could have the unintended consequence of concentrating our minds on how best to create integrated strategies that can more effectively link early warning and state-building into a strategic approach that reduces costs and makes sense to the American public.

Four Fundamental Imperatives

To create a new strategic approach, we must address four imperatives. These are not meant to comprise an exhaustive list of issues, or a prescription to solve all the complex problems we confront. Rather, they represent a tentative agenda of items that might be addressed successfully after we make structural changes in U.S. Government organizations, policies, and strategic security concepts, which could include, for example, the creation of a Directorate for Conflict Prevention and Sustainable Security in the NSC. The ultimate goal of any new structural changes would be the formation and implementation of an innovative and comprehensive government strategy for preventing and managing conflict in fragile states.

First, the conceptual understanding of the nature of conflict must be improved, particularly by identifying the precursors of violence. This will help to overcome the "Chicken Little fallacy"—that is, warning that the sky is falling but not offering any way to avert it. Most early warnings lack the ability to guide policymakers on specific steps to take to avert mass violence. The usual calls for "increased diplomatic pressure" or for humanitarian interventions by the UN or the United States fail to get to the heart of the matter (the actual drivers of violence). Even diplomatic interventions regarded as successful, such as former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's mission in Kenya following the outbreak of violence after the 2007 presidential elections, did not resolve the original grievances that sparked the fighting. Kenya remains tense and could backslide once more if the power-sharing agreement he negotiated unravels or the underlying governance issues are not addressed.

Second, stovepiping must be overcome. Each administration tends to reinvent the wheel. Since the end of the Cold War, various administrations have created new plans, mechanisms, and bureaucratic agencies to deal with the problems of complex emergencies and failing states. Within departments, bureaucratic reshuffling has led to a lack of coordination and redundancy. We need to pull all the relevant bureaus together in a way that is predictable, repeatable, and efficient so each agency or policymaker knows what to do when evidence of impending violence appears. What we want to avoid are ad hoc responses stitched together when killings break out, followed by cookie-cutter state-building responses once killings subside. On the other hand, we must be wary of proceeding on "one-size-fits-all" planning, as efforts must be tailored to the societies in question.

Third, the "discredited democracy mantra" of the Iraq War era, which eroded credibility in U.S. democracy promotion efforts, must be reframed. Democracy needs to be nurtured, but in different ways in different environments. And it is not the same thing as state-building, though the two are linked. In Iraq, democracy was pushed through military means over the objections of the UN. It was hastily advanced in the Palestinian territories through elections that resulted in a Hamas victory in Gaza. Elections—particularly if they are discredited by rigging—have also inspired conflict in Kenya, Afghanistan, Honduras, and Iran. One disgruntled Iraqi underscored this point after the January 2009 provincial elections, saying that he would rather live in an honest dictatorship than in a democracy based on fraud. In divided societies, other imperatives often are given precedence by the population, including justice, reconciliation, the rule of law, economic revival, education, anticorruption, and social well-being—in short, the functions of a working state. A better approach might be one that stresses the creation of the rule of law.

Finally, a structured decisionmaking process for rapid action when early warning alarms are sounded must be created. We must overcome unnecessary delays and diversions in responding to serious crises, working with all our national assets, relevant allies, and international organizations. Extensive work has been done to provide operational guidance in a peace or stability mission.[28] However, this guidance aims at postconflict phases of engagement, does not link up with early warning analyses, and fails to provide guidance on when to act. Decisionmakers need tools that show how serious the threat of violence is, whether mass atrocities are imminent, what kinds of actions might prevent escalation, what other nations and multinational organizations are doing, and what political/military plan would be put into effect if the decision to intervene is made.

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Conclusion

Major intellectual, operational, bureaucratic, and budgeting challenges must be addressed to forge an integrated U.S. strategy toward fragile states. It will not be easy. In real dollar terms, there has been roughly a 30 percent cut in personnel and resources in U.S.

aid and diplomacy for international affairs since the fall of the Berlin Wall, while there has been a dramatic rise in military spending. For every dollar invested in diplomacy, the United States spends $16 on military programs, excluding the expenditures for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[29] Even Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has called on Congress to increase funding for the State Department to correct this stark imbalance.

However, this is not just a problem of funding. *A conceptual foundation* is needed for a holistic approach to sustainable security, to develop the operational principles and procedures for a whole-of-society approach, and to create the institutional infrastructure for smart power applications. When that is done, the justification for requesting or allocating more resources is likely to have more success and be more understandable to the American public.

This broad-based, holistic initiative could come from the NSC. Three recent reports have come to this conclusion. *On the Brink: Weak States and U.S. National Security*, a 2004 report of the Commission on Weak States and U.S. National Security, recommended that the President "create an NSC directorate to reflect the high priority assigned to weak and failing states."[30] More recently, the National Defense University study, *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations*, argued that the burden of interagency coordination and strategic level crisis action planning should be the responsibility of the NSC.[31] Similarly, a report by Refugees International maintained that "the current fledgling Interagency Management System is untested and, we believe, unlikely to prove successful in its current form. . . . Getting this right will require executive oversight above the [C]abinet level—at the National Security Council or, perhaps, within the Office of the Vice President."[32] As these authors point out, there has been enough drift on this vital issue. Leadership needs to come from the White House, and it needs to come soon. **PRISM**

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Notes

[1] The essay from which this passage is taken appears as a chapter in *International Responses to Precarious States: A Comparative Analysis of International Strategies with Recommendations for Action by European Institutions and European Member States*, ed. Stefani Weiss (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2007).

[2] Kristine Eck, Bethany Lacina, and Magnus Oberg, "Civil Conflict in the Contemporary World," in *Resources, Governance, and Civil Conflict*, ed. Magnus Oberg and Kaare Strom (New York: Routledge, 2008). The most recent findings on these issues can be found in J. Joseph Hewitt, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2010: Executive Summary* (College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, September 25, 2009), available at <www.paradigmpublishers.com>. This study found that "over the past two years, the risks of instability and conflict have increased significantly in the regions of the world where those dangers were already high; [that] the number of conflict recurrences . . . has surged to unprecedented levels; [and that] even after excluding post-2003 Iraqi cases . . . total worldwide terrorist attacks have nearly tripled between 2000 and 2006." In

addition, the authors noted that "more than one billion people live in some 50 failed and failing states whose direct and spillover economic costs of $270 billion are more than three times annual global development aid of $80 billion."

[3] To take the notion of *state-building*, for example, this author identified at least 34 definitions and/or approaches used by scholars and practitioners. The term is often used interchangeably with *nationbuilding*, *institution-building*, *capacity-building*, *postconflict reconstruction*, *stabilization*, and *peace-building*. Some regard the process as being driven primarily by the host country, others by international or foreign actors. Some regard state-building as a subset of achieving wider security and development goals, while others feel that providing security and developmental assistance is a prerequisite for the higher goal of state-building. Some regard state-building as applying only to countries coming out of conflict (postconflict reconstruction), while others see it as helping countries avoid conflict (conflict prevention). Finally, some see it as a framework concept for the many different processes needed to reach long-term security (peace-building), while others see it as focused on constructing the formal institutions needed for minimal governing functions (institution-building).

[4] The term *postconflict* is often used incorrectly. Technically, it refers to the period after violent conflict has broken out, not the period when conflict has already died down. In fact, many postconflict operations take place in conflict zones. In those circumstances, state-building often becomes secondary to counterinsurgency or counterterrorism goals.

[5] The author is using the term *state-building* advisedly here to distinguish it from *nationbuilding*. The first term refers largely to building institutional capacities for good governance while the second refers to building identity with the nation as a whole among the people, which outsiders cannot do.

[6] One recent exception is the approach that Special Envoy Ambassador Richard Holbrooke has taken to Afghanistan. He has assembled a first-rate team containing representatives from all the major departments: State, Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Justice, Agriculture, Treasury, and USAID, as well as scholars and nongovernmental area experts. However, when Ambassador Holbrooke formally introduced the team at a Washington press conference on August 12, 2009, two aspects of his strategy remained vague: how his team would coordinate with the military effort on the ground, and how he would measure progress. When asked how he would know when the United States is successful in Afghanistan, he responded, "We will know it when we see it," seemingly ignoring President Barack Obama's commitment to identify clear benchmarks and milestones.

[7] For example, Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 56, from the Clinton administration, attempted to lay out a political/military plan when a decision to intervene was made. Numerous other PDDs have been issued, usually without much regard to what was done in the past, and often irrespective of what other agencies are doing. U.S. Army Field Manuals have become some of the most authoritative and practical guidance for operational and tactical matters, but there is no single document that addresses the strategy of dealing with fragile states.

[8] Some analysts have written that states that are too anarchic, such as Somalia, are not good environments for terrorists, who need a certain measure of order to function. While that is true when fighting is occurring that the terrorists may not have control of, they may have a strong foothold once a friendly regime comes to power. This is what happened in Afghanistan and could happen in Somalia.

[9] See USAID, "US Foreign Aid: Meeting the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century," white paper, Washington, DC, January 2004. USAID noted that one-third of the world's population, or 2 billion people, live

in unstable or fragile areas. The Failed States Index likewise identifies populations living in at-risk countries at roughly 2 billion. Paul Collier, focusing on poverty rather than weak or failing states, has called attention to the "one billion stuck at the bottom . . . living and dying in fourteenth-century conditions." Such poverty is a hallmark of a weak state that may be failing. See Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done about It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). According to the Institute for State Effectiveness, "Today between 40 and 60 states, home to close to two billion people, suffer from a 'sovereignty gap': they are not able to perform the functions expected of a state in the 21st century." See <www.effectivestates.org>.

[10] The literature reveals different estimates depending on various definitions used. This estimate is based on The Failed States Index, an annual assessment of the top 60 at-risk states published in *Foreign Policy*, available at <www.foreignpolicy.com>. For the analysis of all 177 states in the index, go to <www.fundforpeace.org>.

[11] Obviously, not all weak and failing states become safe havens or transit points for terrorists and other criminal networks. The task of the analyst and policymaker is to identify which ones are candidates for such exploitation. Nonetheless, the generic point remains valid: the lack of a well-established legitimate government authority and institutionalized good governance offers attractive opportunities for illicit or criminal behavior by governing elites or nonstate groups.

[12] The United States neglected Afghanistan after the Soviets were driven out, allowing the Taliban and al Qaeda to move in. Neglect has also been seen in other countries once immediate security threats are addressed, with state-building given too short a period to take root. This then creates a cycle of recurring conflict, with repeated outside interventions that never seem to create sustainable security.

[13] Jeffrey Gettleman, "The Most Dangerous Place in the World," *Foreign Policy* (March-April 2009), 62.

[14] Various terms are used to describe military operations in fragile states: *stability, security, transition, reconstruction, complex, irregular war,* and *hybrid war*. The United States uses these terms to refer to military operations that require collaboration among U.S. Departments of Defense and State, USAID, and other agencies as well as with nongovernmental organizations/international organizations and host national governments, and that present full-spectrum conflict challenges on the ground. The United Nations and other organizations refer to such operations as *peace operations* or *peace enforcement* under Chapter VII authority, in which U.S. troops may or may not be involved.

[15] *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, September 2002), 1.

[16] Field Manual (FM) 3–07, *Stability Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, October 2008), vi.

[17] FM 3–07, foreword. China, which is beginning to take on some modest peacekeeping responsibilities, describes such missions in its 2008 Defense White Paper as *military operations other than war*, using the same term that has now become dated in Western usage. See Cynthia A. Watson, "The Chinese Armed Forces and Non-Traditional Missions: A Growing Tool of Statecraft," *China Brief* 9, no. 4 (February 20, 2009).

[18] See Hans Binnendijk and Patrick M. Cronin, eds., *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2009).

[19] James Kitfield, "Clinton Needs Diplomats and Nation Builders," *National Journal,* January 9, 2009, available at <http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/nw_20090109_7025.php>.

[20] Niall Ferguson, "The Axis of Upheaval," *Foreign Policy* (March-April 2009), 58.

[21] The core group includes Susan Rice, Samantha Powers, Gayle Smith, Michèle Flournoy, Rick Barton, Carlos Pascual, and others, all of whom have written about the need for quicker and more effective responses or who are serving in the current administration or have served in previous administrations in capacities where they took such positions.

[22] There are numerous examples of think tanks and human rights organizations pressing for action. A Genocide Prevention Task Force headed by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Secretary of Defense William Cohen, and sponsored by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the American Academy of Diplomacy called for the United States to put the prevention of genocide high on the foreign policy agenda and for the Nation to take preventive action, along with international partners, in its first report. See "Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policymakers," December 2008. A January 2009 USIP project on "Passing the Baton: Foreign Policy Challenges and Opportunities Facing the New Administration" convened four panel presentations focusing on early warning and state-building. Activist groups such as Enough, Save Darfur, and others have consistently called for strong actions against genocide in the Sudan, as have celebrities such as George Clooney and Mia Farrow. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's first trip abroad was criticized by human rights organizations for downplaying human rights issues during her visit to China, where she pursued a strategy of cooperation on issues such as climate change, rather than Tibet or political protestors within China.

[23] The Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Humanity United, the Ploughshares Fund, and the Compton Foundation are among the main donor organizations that have led the way in their peace and security and conflict prevention programs. A number of scholars have worked on these issues, and individual donors, such as Milton Leitenberg and Peter Ackerman, have likewise supported efforts to reduce mass atrocities and promote nonviolent means of settling disputes. The United States Holocaust Museum likewise has several programs that aim at averting genocide and mass atrocities, as does the USIP, a government funded organization.

[24] See, for example, Michael J. Dziedzic, "Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments," paper presented at the International Studies Association's 50th annual convention, New York, NY, February 15, 2009, available at <www.allacademic.com/meta/p312164_index.html>.

[25] Statistics from the Center on International Cooperation at New York University, *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2008* (New York: Lynne Rienner, 2008). For an excellent review of peacekeeping trends, see Donald C.F. Daniel, Patricia Taft, and Sharon Wiharta, eds., *Peace Operations: Trends, Progress, and Prospects* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008).

[26] See "Implementing the Responsibility to Protect: Report of the Secretary-General," A/63/677, January 12, 2009.

[27] An exception was NATO intervention into Kosovo, which was judged by the Goldstone Commission to have been an illegal (not supported by the United Nations) but nonetheless legitimate intervention.

[28] See, for example, the State Department's detailed list of stability-focused postconflict reconstruction Essential Tasks List developed by the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization.

[29] Kitfield.

[30] Jeremy M. Weinstein, John Edward Porter, and Stuart E. Eizenstat, *On the Brink: Weak States and U.S. National Security* (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2004), 32.

[31] James A. Schear and Leslie B. Curtin, "Complex Operations: Calibrating the State Department's Role," in Binnendijk and Cronin, 110.

[32] Ron Capps, *Drawing on the Full Strength of America: Seeking Greater Civilian Capacity in U.S. Foreign Affairs* (Washington, DC: Refugees International, 2009), ii, available at <www.refugeesinternational.org/sites/default/files/09_FullStrength.pdf>.