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Estandart Reyau d'a Cheneralísma, prencipal bandera carlista d'a primera guerra bordada por María Francisca de Braganza em 1833 Royal Standard of the General in Chief, main Carlist flag of the First War embroidered by Maria Francisca de Braganza in 1833). Wikimedia Commons

Failed states: The need for a paradigm shift in peace-driven state-building

by JAIME A. TEIXEIRA DA SILVA

“war made the state and the state made war” (Tilly, 1992, p. 42)

ABSTRACT: This paper examines select distinct characteristics of failed states (FSs). The strongest factors that might characterize a FS are a collapse in moral and ethical values, failed leadership, pressures and threats by international forces, the exploitation of natural resources, as well as internal and external dissent and protest. In some cases, FSs are artificially collapsed, but are such economic and political geo-strategies warranted? International conflict resolution might not necessarily achieve this, and quite the opposite, either through direct military interventions or pro- or contra-government militias, or via more “peaceful” coalitional strategizing under “humanitarian” or “climate change” banners, keep a state in perpetual dysfunction, providing optimal conditions for long-term exploitation of its resources. Alternative solutions for peacebuilding, such as women’s activism, or anarchist approaches do not seem to be robust solutions to conflicts that might require military interventions, while the pacification of radical insurgencies is an imperfect solution, so more attention is needed to this topic. Adaptive peacebuilding has emerged as a novel paradigm in peacebuilding efforts to deal with FSs.

KEYWORDS: ADAPTIVE PEACEBUILDING; ANARCHY; COLLAPSE IN VALUES AND INFRASTRUCTURE; CONFLICT; CORRUPTION; DYSFUNCTIONALITY; EXTERNAL INFLUENCES; INTERVENTIONISM; LEGITIMACY; NEOLIBERAL PEACEBUILDING; NETWORKS; QUALITY; RISKS; SECURITY; THREATS; VIABILITY

What characteristics might define a failed state?

Conscientious of the fallacies and frailties of the “failed state” (FS) concept (Call, 2008), a FS can nonetheless arise when a government’s infrastructure collapses, making it dysfunctional or insecure (Newman, 2009). In part, this occurs as a result of the unregulated proliferation of criminal networks in a destabilized society (Di John, 2010). In response to conflict, failure and fragility (Nogueira, 2017), capacity, security and legitimacy gaps ensue,

with a FS lying at the intersection between all three (Call, 2011). That triangularization may then lead to increased militarization, socio-economic and political fragility, organized crime (Vieira, 2023), and ultimately the collapse of the state (Grimm et al., 2014), as typified by countries such as Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, Libya, or the Central African Republic (CAR) (Johais et al., 2020), even if localized pockets of zones of relative peace¹ exist, such as Rojava in Syria (Nordhag, 2021), despite its war-torn state (Muto, 2023). The collapse in governance may come about from internal conflict, corrupt leadership, the loss of economic viability or the interference of foreign powers, as was suggested for the CAR (de Vries & Glawion, 2015), while civil conflict, tribalism, and an economic crisis were attributed to the collapse of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (Aliyev & Souleimanov, 2019a). None of these should be looked at in isolation when characterizing the reasons for the existence of a FS (Wilde, 2003; Solomon, 2013; Frith & Glenn, 2015). In recent history, the FS label has become associated with an economic and political agenda, and may reflect an attempt to label a nation that may have value systems different than those of traditionally hegemonic Western powers (Bøås & Jennings, 2007; Lemay-Hébert, 2019a).

The initial classification of a FS bred an expanded classification system and associated lexicon by non-failed states (or states that perceived themselves to be harmonious, successful, democratic or morally superior), in an attempt to divide the loose concept of FSSs, as states that could be considered as rogue, weak, non-states, phantom, mirage, anemic, captured, aborted, fragile, collapsed, quasi, monopole or anarchic (Orman, 2016). The separation between any two or all of these categorizations, and the marginal, hybrid, interstitial, or external liminality, which are artificial constructs that result, are products of the level of measures put in place to fortify national, as opposed to international, *de jure* sovereignty (Loh & Heiskanen, 2020). Conversely, the willingness to adopt those hegemonic values, or an alignment of values to those required by the US to meet “democratic principles”, as was observed in Chile, Argentina, and Peru (Hybel, 2020), or former Yugoslav Republics (Milačić, 2022), can lead to some socio-economic stabilization.

Independent of the politicized use of this label, a characteristic of a FS is its

1 Sustaining peace, as defined by the UNSC (2016): “both a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account”

ability to destabilize neighboring or other international states that may be more financially or socio-politically stable (Mielke et al., 2020), the use of political settlements to seek stability and to become more inclusive and less violent (Tadros & Allouche, 2017), or even the internal destabilization by non-violent forces that tip the state of fragility to one of failure (Aliyev, 2017). A history of ethno-nationalism, a radical student movement and Marxism–Leninism contributed to the fragmented statebuilding initiatives of Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s, and continued to contribute to exclusionary policies by the leading factions up until the war in 2020 (Tadese et al., 2021).

Restabilization, including through social reengineering and socio-political restructuring and development (Bøås, 2017), all while considering the sovereignty and right to self-determination of the FS to avoid the rise of armed insurrections against imposing or invading forces (Qureshi, 2018; Lemay-Hébert, 2019b), may be initialized in the form of forced military occupations by great powers in pursuit of a new world order (Chomsky, 2006; Magu, 2019a, 2019b), foreign forces or armed groups (Rondeau, 2011), as a pretext to protect the civilian population, especially of unrecognized states (Souleimanov et al., 2018), as a proxy by claiming the defense of ethnic value systems (Aliyev, 2019a), or to improve the social and security services offered by rebel groups (Pfeifer & Schwab, 2023). In some cases, however, as occurred in the Donbass, Trojan Horse approaches might fail or falter, and pretexts then need to be readjusted, in this case, to fortify a proxy war between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Kumar, 2023), with Ukraine being the target intermediary (Kormych et al., 2023; Potočník & Mares, 2023), setting the scene for and activating the current Russo-Ukrainian war. Is Ukraine then heading towards the status of a FS, as a frozen conflict, with permanent foreign military and socio-economic intervention (Forsberg & Patomäki, 2023)? Such frozen conflicts are not new, as shown by Cyprus and Kosovo (Jackson, 2022), or the Russian-Chechen conflict (Ferent & Mancini, 2023). Separately, one cannot disassociate the role of former colonialism, with British or Spanish rule having resulted in states with lower risk of failure as opposed to those under Portuguese or French rule (Tusalem, 2016).

Yet, within what international legal framework do foreign invasions of sovereign states operate (von Engelhardt, 2018)? According to US-based policy, 30% of FSs are in Africa (Magu, 2019b), with conventional narratives attributing civil wars to the decline of state powers and guerrilla movements sustaining a state

of decay (Péclard, 2019). Select examples include Yemen's occupation by Saudi Arabia (Clausen, 2019), the establishment by the US of biopolitical strategic bases in Africa, starting from 2008, as Africa Command (AFRICOM) (McNeill, 2017), or the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) in the Sahel (Raineri & Baldaro, 2020). The political aims of such military occupations may be associated with neo-imperialism (Jones, 2013; Ismail, 2016; Magu, 2019a, 2019b), rapid liberalization that may induce further instability (Bradshaw, 2014), smart wars and insurgencies (Hinnebusch, 2018), or globalized democratization via the rule of imposed law, stability and justice (Wydra, 2020). They might also involve pro-government militias (Aliyev, 2019b; Aliyev & Souleimanov, 2019b). Yet, it has been claimed that mandates such as those by the United Nations (UN) in a world of changing global order (de Coning & Peter, 2019) seek to maintain peace rather than attempt to end war (Samson, 2018) because it was built as a set of technical solutions that tended to ignore the historical context of civil wars (Péclard, 2019). However, the declaration of a nation as a FS is not necessarily established by foreign powers, nor do pro- or contra-state forces or militias necessarily induce FSs to become them (Yeşiltaş et al., 2023). In Indonesia, to consolidate political and economic power in the post-Suharto era, the Indonesian military re-projected its image from one that had supported the dictator of a FS to one that was in defense of the nation, including against potential foreign forces seeking perhaps to implement their own agenda (Heiduk, 2014).

The military-backed imposition of a new socio-political system, born out of the concept of a "monopoly over legitimate violence" (Saeed, 2020), may occur through the forced implementation of new value and moral systems with imposed misaligned "legitimacy" that might not always be able to appreciate the sensitivities of local culture (Roberts, 2008), improved food, medical and health security (Quinn et al., 2014; Nogueira, 2017), perpetual economic enslavement (Litsas, 2014), peace-keeping and human-building that may involve violence to induce "peace" (Selby, 2013; Balthasar, 2017), stability and prosperity (Newman, 2011, 2013), often using acronyms evoking superiority and grandeur of their military missions (e.g., Operation Enduring Freedom) (Eastridge et al., 2006), but may instead be used as a front for the exploration and exploitation of valuable natural or renewable resources (Ide, 2015; Magu, 2019a, 2019b; Onuoha, 2020). Stabilization may be static (where change is actively prevented), or dynamic, where change is moderated or carefully controlled (Mielke et al., 2020). Some states

might also self-servingly abuse the FS label or over-exaggerate their state of conflict or strife in order to gain from foreign aid, such as in Uganda (Fisher, 2014) or Ukraine in the 2014-2022 buildup prior to Russia's invasion in February of 2022.

FS-related operations can be overseen by international bodies such as, but not limited to, the UN, NATO, World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), Human Rights Council (HRC), World Trade Organization (WTO), International Criminal Court (ICC), or Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to give the impression of social, economic and democratic legitimacy, even if they might not necessarily be so (Roberts, 2008; Schwarz, 2010; Stuenkel & Tourinho, 2014; Balthasar, 2017; Haastrup & Dijkstra, 2017; Saeed, 2020). As one example, liberal peacebuilding initiatives by the UN have taken place in Somalia (a recognized state), whereas in Somaliland (an unrecognized state), development in the post-conflict environment is criticized as being limited, not extending much beyond relief (Njeri, 2019; Ingiriis, 2021).

The authority, legitimacy, and building-capacity of the “invading”, imposing, or replacement force will determine the longevity, stability and persistence of the newly replaced system (Tikuisis et al., 2015). On occasion, external forces might be hyperbolized while internal fragilities might be underrated, reducing the impact of a foreign influence on the stability of a FS (Raineri & Baldaro, 2020). Yet, the mere presence of a foreign military force to establish an international sovereignty, under the pretext of “peace”, may be perceived as a threat and violation of national sovereignty and the rights of locals (Loh & Heiskanen, 2020). International intervention might then take on a “sot” approach, under a humanitarian pretext, via the action of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, or IGOs and NGOs, as exemplified by Mozambique (Saraiva, 2023), which would then assist with the implementation of desired socio-political policies (Irrera, 2022). In extreme cases, foreign intervention has a destabilizing effect, counter to its desired peaceful strategy, and such a state of restlessness within those societies may allow lawlessness, radicalism and terrorism to breed, then leading to “wars on terror” (Pašagić, 2020), even orchestrated by the same forces that originally came to instill “peace” (Bøås & Jennings, 2007).

The rationalization for increased securitization often involves “fear-mongering” and messages of threats and risk, perhaps even hyperbolization as “anarchy”, in a bid to rally social emotion and solidify political support, but also risking triggering social media-induced instability (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2017).

Have climate change and sustainable developmental goals been coopted as proxy peacebuilding strategies?

Within the context provided above, of societies in moral or social decline, caused either by internal or external causes, forces seeking ways to continue or expand insecurities for their own exploitative needs may turn to new and novel ways to maintain the failed state of a FS, or to create new FSs. In the author's opinion, climate change and the UN's sustainable developmental goals (SDGs) may have become two new political vehicles for achieving this, particularly SDG 16² in the latter case. The process begins at a somewhat rational level: in a neo-Malthusian manner, the argument is made that reduced natural resources or increasing competition for a limited supply of them, will increase social conflict; in contrast, in the Cornucopian train of thought, it is argued that other factors such as corruption or poor resource management lead to conflicts over resource scarcity, while overall, any or all of these factors might lead to social and/or political conflict (Koubi, 2019). A constant cycle of radical or severe climatic conditions place strain on renewable resources and make the food security of populations vulnerable, thus inducing continuous cycles of conflict (Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021), serving as the pretext to send in international groups, or forces, to keep peace, but under the "climate change" or SDG banner. The final step is to "militarize" climate change and SDGs, by attempting to link them, and the social effects they have on society, with government powers that may be leaning towards authoritarianism, or "violating human rights", as was suggested for the Philippines (Holden, 2023), even as a tenuous peace is maintained since 2014 between the central government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Bangsamoro region, which gained semi-autonomy (Söderberg Kovacs et al., 2021).

Reforming peacebuilding and a shift towards adaptive peacebuilding

de Coning et al. (2023) argued that several global threats, including but not limited to climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical power shifts, advances in information technology and globalization's negative impacts, "have increased the risk of violent conflict and have made preventing and resolving it more complex" (p. 1), thus requiring novel solutions to peace. Some have advo-

2 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>

cated for external forces not to be involved and instead to seek local solutions as the most viable way of achieving stability for local or regional challenges (Solomon, 2015). Some claim that the UN model of peacebuilding has failed (Öjendal et al., 2021), despite its renovated conceptualization (UN & World Bank, 2018; UN, 2021), but has the opportunity of being successful if built on an agenda that promotes integral grassroots leadership (Mahmoud, 2023). However, this is a constant process that only manages to achieve an “approximation” of peace (Coleman et al., 2021; Paffenholz, 2021). The stalemate (even failure) often observed with (neo)liberal state-building (Cassin & Zyla, 2021), as one form of peacebuilding (Bargués et al., 2023; Travouillon, 2023), could be avoided while also side-stepping colonialist claims, by adopting an anarchist approach involving “prefigurative politics and direct action, strengthening autonomy, decentralization, and horizontality”, as well as “radical [...] self-determination” (p. 18) (Rusche, 2022).

Another conceptual model of peace involves a form of civil disobedience, or “disobedient peace”, that claims to be nonviolent and successful in Tunisia and Sudan (Mahmoud, 2023) while a “top-down” approach by Chinese interventionism in South Sudan employs development as the driver of peace (Hirono, 2023). These efforts hint at a wider desire for a pacifist “anti-war praxis” to address failed American-driven neoliberal state-building driven by imperial war-guided policies (Keyel, 2023). They also suggest that violence is ineffectively controlled by governance institutions, so a new paradigm is needed to counter the current model of inducing disorder as the path towards achieving peace, following war (Phillips, 2019). Yet, given the multi-faceted nature of peace, and its elusive nature, adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning, 2018) needs to take local peculiarities into account, including the expectations of conflicting parties, and their aspirations (Jarstad et al., 2019).

Another approach to pacify radical insurgencies is by encouraging more effective rebel governance and stimulating state-insurgent cooperation (Stewart, 2023), such as in Côte d’Ivoire and Sri Lanka (*Åkebo & Bastian, 2021*; van Baalen, 2023; van Baalen & Terpstra, 2023), Colombia (Penagos, 2023; Richter & Barrios Sabogal, 2023), Iraq and Syria (Bamber-Zryd, 2022; Hyypä, 2023; Termeer, 2023), Afghanistan (Termeer, 2023), Myanmar (Buscemi, 2023), Palestine and the Gaza Strip (Alijla, 2023), the CAR (Glawion & Le Noan, 2023), or even in Turkey (O’Connor & Akin, 2023). Conversely, insurgent groups may

seek to provide security, basic services, and thereby enhance social cohesion of the populations under their control, as was attempted by the Islamic State (da Silva et al., 2023; Termeer, 2023), then seize power following the establishment of proto-state administrations (Tuastad et al., 2021).

Curiously, while Covid-19 emboldened the activity and status of some rebel and insurgent groups by escalating military activity in response to uncertainty and civil strife in the states that they are opposing (Idler & Hochmüller, 2020; Furlan, 2020), given that this is a transmissible disease, it also negatively impacted the health of other rebels groups or insurgencies (Swed, 2021; Newman et al., 2023), although clear trends are not yet apparent and are context-specific (Polo, 2020; Bloem & Salemi, 2021; Mehrl & Thurner, 2021).

What other solutions are in play to address, or replace, the UN-style of peacebuilding? Cárdenas & Olivius (2021) advocated for women's peace activism, both in Myanmar and beyond. Jarstad (2021) claimed that imbalanced land ownership in post-Apartheid South Africa was a source of constant conflict with the potential to tend to civil war if unresolved. Howell (2021) advocated for music-based peacebuilding. Macheka (2022), within the context of Zimbabwe, suggested unmasking perpetrators of violence, an open dialogue between perpetrators and victims, reparations and compensation, and the depoliticization of peace processes. Lee (2021) alluded to the need for "plurality, subtlety, and connectivity" to achieve peace in Cambodia, as communities interacted with leaders of the former Khmer Rouge. However, since both conflict and peace are complex, and since peacebuilding is generally sought amidst violence while violence may flare amidst peacebuilding, finding a simple solution, such as those indicated above, or the involvement of women, is not always possible, and so 'radical alterity', or a radically different vision than that currently in place, would be necessary to reform current practices (Millar, 2021).

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