

How to prevent 'Failed' States

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Abstract: This paper examines the current discourse on 'Failed States'. The paper seeks to identify the parameters used in the global discourse to label a state as a 'failure'. It seeks to highlight the fallacy in defining geographically, culturally and economically diverse states as 'failed states' by putting them together in a category. By taking the examples of India and Pakistan (and other countries) the paper traces the importance of a country's history and colonial legacy in state success or failure. Can a state be critical and yet not be a failure? Can an alternative model of assistance be developed for states that are ranked low on the Failed States Index?

Keywords: Democracy, Failed States Index, Global Fund for Peace, India, Pakistan

I. Introduction

The world is faced with many security threats, from terrorism to unstable governments that lead to weak states. Think-tanks all around the world judge states on the basis of chosen parameters. Therefore, states are categorized into failing, critical etc. To answer the question of how to prevent failed states one has to know about the global discourse on what exactly is a "state" and when does it lose its legitimacy. In the sections that follow, the examples of India and Pakistan have been carefully chosen after reviewing their performance by the annually published Failed States Index (2012). The state of Pakistan has been called as 'critical'. First-hand information from a personal interview conducted with Mr. Rezaul Hasan, Press Trust of India's correspondent in Pakistan (2007-2013) has been used to substantiate Pakistan's undemocratic record.

II. Problems

There is no clear consensus on the definition of a failed state. To understand the concept of a failed state, one needs to define a state. Max Weber defines a state as a "compulsory political organisation with a centralized government that maintains a monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a certain territory". When this is broken, like for example when warring groups destabilize Somalia and form Somaliland- the state loses its sovereign authority over its territory and can be described as a failed state. This definition is used widely and it includes an erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, an inability to provide public services and an inability to interact with other states as full members of the international community (Fund for Peace).

The United States think tank Fund for Peace along with Foreign Policy magazine publishes an annual Failed States Index. The list only assesses states recognized by the United Nations and therefore excludes Palestinian Territories, Northern Cyprus, Kosovo and Western Sahara. Here we find a lack of data for states that exist de facto (in reality) rather than on a de jure (or legally recognized) basis. The states are assessed on 12 indicators falling within economic, social and political spheres. The Failed States Index of 2012 shows that Somalia, DR Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Haiti, Yemen, Iraq and Central African Republic are all placed on "Alert". Countries like Pakistan, Myanmar (Burma) and Nepal are on "Warning" (Failed States Index Report, 2012).

III. India and Pakistan

Pakistan's rank is 13 and score is 101.6 (a lower rank and higher score is indicative of a country that is critical), whereas its neighbour India is ranked 78 and scored at 78 (India is in danger, a level below critical). Both India and Pakistan became independent countries in August 1947 through a process of massive riots and partition. India has remained a democracy since the past 65 years, never having a competition for power between the military and civilian government.

However, Pakistan has had civilian rule for only 25 years out of its 65 year existence. The struggle between the military and civilian governments has led to various coups, its budget is over-weighted with military spending and dependence on foreign aid from the US and China. Despite India's Naxalite insurgency, the Indian government is seen as capable of governing its territory. Although the violence unleashed by the Naxals, have targeted the common people and ministers, the "Naxal issue" is not seen as an indicator of a failing state.

In contrast, Pakistani Government's inability to control religious extremism and violence in North-Western Province bordering Afghanistan is internationally recognized as signs of a failing state. *"Regardless of who takes over, Pakistan continues to teeter on non-governability. Its own version of the Taliban with ties to the Afghan Taliban, are complicated by the strong mysterious influence of the ISI, the country's intelligence service. The strength of the Supreme Court, which has repeatedly and successfully challenged the executive branch, leading to dismissal of a prime minister, contributes to the signs of a failing state"*(Ranis, 2013). During the 1950s and 1960s Pakistan was on a faster developmental path whereas India was lagging behind. But by the 1990s India had incorporated various economic reforms and Pakistan, in the absence of reform could not change itself structurally, as India did. Pakistan till date refuses to tax its feudal lords, relies heavily on foreign donors and the official unemployment rate, as given by the International Labour Organisation is 6%. The nation of Pakistan, adding to its problems, lacks multiculturalism. Whereas India adopts a "salad bowl" model of multiculturalism, meaning different cultures co-exist together without forced assimilation, Pakistan has opted for a more homogenous, unified identity based on religion. It works in a nation's favour to promote heterogeneity because then its people are free to choose for themselves.

The biggest blow to Pakistan's sovereignty has perhaps been the drone strikes on "non-state actors" within the state. Moreover sectarian conflicts between the Sunni/Shi'a within Pakistan have also increased. Naturally, all 12 indicators in the Failed states Index show that Pakistan is critical. But where does that leave the discourse on the definition of a failed state?

IV. North-South Divide

In Jaipur Literature Festival in Jaipur, Rajasthan, India in January 2013- a variety of views emerged. BarkhaDutt, an Indian journalist focused on the US definition of a failed state- "A state incapable of protecting its borders." LalehKhadiivi, an Iranian-American journalist said that the borders of a state cannot define its success or failure. Mary Harper, a writer specialising in Africa, said that "Even if the government fails, the culture, society and economy survives" and presented her views against Western intervention in Somalia.

"The discourse of failed states has come into criticism from various countries in the South, which see the "failed state" discourse as a pretext by many countries (particularly USA) to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of another state. These pretexts they argue have changed from "rogue states", "spreading democracy", "regime change" "the war against narcotics" to the current discourse on "failed states" (Huria, 2008, p 3).

The countries in the western world took a period of four to seven centuries to convert into nation-states whereas the countries in the global south are expected to complete their nation-building process in a few decades. A major criticism of the evaluation criteria of a failed state is that it is described by a catch-all framework. Every problem faced by a developing nation today is placed as a criterion.

"Lacking a consensus definition, scholars tend to lump all troubled developing countries into a single, catch-all "failed state" category. The results are not encouraging. Besides obscuring their unique cultural legacies, historical experiences, and current challenges, this hodgepodge approach risks encouraging generic, one-size-fits-all policies instead of thoughtful interventions tailored to the unique causes and expressions of instability in a given case.

Among the bottom 20 countries in the 2006 Failed States Index, for instance, one finds Sudan, Iraq, Zimbabwe, Haiti, Afghanistan, Liberia, Pakistan, North Korea, Nepal, Yemen, and Burma. What strikes one immediately is the heterogeneity among these countries in terms of their relative population, political stability, government capacity, regime legitimacy, and current trajectory" (Patrick, 2007, p 647).

V. Prevention

When the East Timor crisis broke out in Indonesia in the late 1990s, by the time the UN mission reached East Timor, the physical infrastructure was destroyed beyond repair. When they caught the people who had carried out violence against women and children they didn't even have a prison to put them in. They had to re-build the nation of East-Timor from scratch. One way of preventing failed states and helping post-conflict societies is to have a citizen-oriented civil society strategy. In view of the existing weaknesses apparent in current approaches to civil society development, a concrete civil society strategy should include several basic objectives and should create incentives for poor people to engage in collective action as citizens rather than as clients of either political power-holders or the development machinery.

"In post-genocide Rwanda, major donors became interested in the concept of ubudehe, community driven reconstruction, as advocated by the Rwandan government. Ubudeheenvisioned block grants at the local level for development schemes. These block grants would go to the lowest level of the state—the collinesor hill-based communes. The idea was that the program would begin at the local and provincial level and then be expanded nationwide. As in most post-conflict development interventions, individual donors acted within the confines of their own methodologies and available funding. The EU acted as the prime donor."(Uvin and Cohen, 2006, p. 9)

In the personal interview conducted for this paper with Mr. Rezaul Hasan, Press Trust of India Correspondent in Islamabad who has been in Pakistan since the past 6 years, he said that in the case of Pakistan, the world community needs to use a “carrot and stick” policy. The world’s powers have to make it clear to Pakistan that it can no longer use militancy and terrorism as an instrument of state policy. They have to make it clear to Pakistan’s military that it can no longer continue to use militant groups as proxy forces against countries like India and Afghanistan.

At the same time, the world’s powers have to strengthen pro-democracy forces and bolster those who are willing to go against extremists, militants and conservative forces. When I asked him about the option of imposing stringent economic sanctions on Pakistan, this was Mr. Hasan’s reply- “I think sanctions, especially the US concept of sanctions, don’t work. That has been demonstrated by the impact of sanctions that were imposed by the US in connection with Pakistan’s nuclear programme. The problem is not so much with Pakistan’s elite who are power-hungry and care little for the poor - as it is with Pakistan’s all-powerful military establishment and intelligence agencies. US and Western has to be aimed at this power centre while steps should also be taken to make the elite more accountable. For example, some of the richest Pakistanis pay virtually no taxes. There will have to be a carefully calibrated policy that uses a range of options - both punitive and reward-oriented, though fewer of the latter options - to make Pakistan change course. Across-the-board sanctions only affect the common people and could increase distrust and dislike for the US at a time when anti-American sentiments in Pakistan are already at an unprecedented level.”

VI. Conclusion

Preventing failing states from becoming ‘failed’ states, one needs to adopt an approach that is unique to the state in question. “*States can fail in any of these five aspects of statehood, suggesting a typology of five types of failed state: anarchic, illegitimate, incompetent, unproductive, and barbaric. Anarchic states lack security as, for example, Iraq did in 2006. Illegitimate states cannot command the loyalty or consent of the population because of some perceived injustice—perhaps including Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011. Incompetent states lack functioning institutions and simply cannot deliver goods and services, such as Haiti. Unproductive states are not simply poor; they have malformed economies because of war, looting, smuggling, and black markets, such as West Africa in the 1990s. Barbaric states murder their own citizens on a large scale, such as Sudan. These different types of failure imply different strategies of state-building. What Iraq needed in 2006 was different from what Haiti needs today. The international community must be able to study the situation on the ground, understand the type and degree of state failure, and tailor a nation-building strategy accordingly. Such a strategy, according to Georgetown University Professor Lise Howard’s study UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars, requires a culture of institutional learning, a bottom-up approach in which missions in the field design themselves as much as headquarters in New York or Washington design them, and more rapid decision making.*” (Miller, 2011, p. 63-74).

There has been a lot of scepticism about the success of nation-building where critics often give the example of the failure of Somalia. They think of Germany and Japan’s success at nation building as exceptions that prove the rule. However, to paraphrase Sherlock Holmes “exceptions do not prove rules, they disprove them.” Japan and Germany’s success- especially Japan that had no history of a democracy and was a non-western nation that suffered immense devastation after the world war, serves as proof that a nation can be re-built to serve national security interests.

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