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STATE FAILURE AND STATES POISED TO FAIL:

ASIA AND DEVELOPING NATIONS

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The Theory

There are several ways to discuss nation-state failure, but if we want to be as specific and as conclusive as possible, it behooves us to substitute clear for muddy criteria, and empirical for impressionistic measures. Doing so then enables us to be diagnostic – to determine which nation-states are strong, which are weak, which are failing (approaching failure or poised on the cusp of failure), which are fully failed, and which have so thoroughly failed that they may be considered collapsed.

As I explained earlier in *When States Fail*, the test of failure is the extent to which nation-states (such as in Kim Jong-il's North Korea, the SLORC's Burma, or Sheikh Hasina's Bangladesh) perform or fail to perform for their peoples, that is, the extent to which they deliver high or low levels of political goods and thus satisfy the fundamental, expressed, expectations and needs of their citizens.[1] A prime function of the nation-state, after all, is to provide political goods to persons living within its border. I aggregate those political goods under five main categories – safety and security, rule of law and transparency, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development. To examine weakness, failure, or collapse, I measure the provision of political goods, assigning quantitative values to the various components of the main

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[1] Robert I. Rotberg, "The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair," in Rotberg (ed.) *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, 2004), 1-45. Originally there were nine categories. Now I use five, encompassing the nine.

categories. For example, the extent to which various measurements show that the educational or health political goods are being satisfied within a nation-state can be expressed numerically, especially in comparison with its neighbors or its peer cohort of nation-states. Crime rates differentiate easily along the safety continuum among countries. Battle deaths show how much violence there is within a nation-state, and so on.

Failed states are those states which fall below a threshold of political goods and, always, fail to satisfy the safety and security minimums. Those states close to the threshold might be at that near threshold point for decades, as Haiti was before violence consumed it in 2002, or Nepal before the monarchical implosion, or they might suddenly fall from strength to failure because of a sudden reversal of legitimacy, as was the case of Cote d'Ivoire in 2000. Pakistan, a failing entity, has teetered on the brink of outright failure for decades, but its governmental illegitimacy in the Musharraf and post-Musharraf era encourages the breakdown of public order, cascading insecurity, the rise of non-state actors such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and political goods' deficits of staggering complexity. By assigning numbers to these many values (of sub-categories of each political good) we can track precipitous declines from strength to weakness to the edge of failure. We can show precisely how close to failure a nation-state might be. Without the numbers, and without precise criteria, all assignments of weakness or failure are guesswork, subject to selection bias or prejudice.

The hierarchy of political goods is topped by publicly provided security. The state's prime function is to prevent cross-border invasions, to eliminate attacks on the national order or social structure, to minimize crime, and "to enable citizens to resolve their differences with the state and their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion."[2]

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[2] Robert I. Rotberg, "The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair," in Rotberg (ed.), *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, 2004), 3.

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When there is security, indeed, only when security prevails, the delivery of the other desirable political goods becomes possible. Pakistan's 2009 dilemma illustrates the overriding imperative of Weberian security. So does Bangladesh in the aftermath of the 2009 mutiny. Now that Sri Lanka has deprived the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of the last vestiges of internal territory it is possible that the government can "secure" the entire state for the first time in three decades.

Second after security is the provision of "predictable, recognizable, systematized methods of adjudicating disputes…." -- an enforceable rule of law and an effective judicial system.[3] Third is the political good that allows free and open participation in the national political arena. This good also encompasses the essential freedoms, including fundamental civil and human rights. The remaining political goods contribute to economic growth and human development: health and educational opportunities, well-developed arteries of commerce and communications networks, respect for the environmental commons, and a well-managed economy, as explained in *When States Fail* and in the introductions to the 2007, 2008, and 2009 editions of *Strengthening African Governance*.[4]

By these criteria, strong states deliver a broad range of high-quality political goods and show up well on all of the standard indices of economic, political, and social performance. All strong states are secure and comparatively safe states. Weak states may be inherently weak for structural reasons or fundamentally strong but situationally or temporarily compromised. Weakness does not come from weakness, but rather from performance or delivery inadequacies that are quantifiable and are not artifacts of exogenous variables. Often these weak nation-states display ethnic or other inter-

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[3] Ibid, 3
[4] Robert I. Rotberg and Rachel Gisselquist, *Strengthening African Governance: the 2009 Index of African Governance* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).

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communal tensions that have not yet been turned violent. They are poorly governed, i.e., they have a diminished ability (not capacity) to supply some or many of the basic political goods, nearly always honoring the rule of law in the breach. They show declining economic and social attainments, and their physical infrastructure betrays neglect. Often this kind of nation-state is ruled by a tyrant, elected or not.

In failed nation-states there are insurgencies, civil unrest, and a heady mixture of discontent and dissent. These kinds of states are violent, but "it is not the absolute intensity of violence that identifies a failed state." Instead, it is the "enduring character of that violence" -- a crescendo of antagonism that is directed at the regime in power. These (mostly) civil wars are rooted in ethnic, linguistic or other intercommunal enmity, but are propelled by avarice enticed by pools of mineral or similar wealth. It is important to reiterate that all failed states exhibit communal competition, but state failure should not be ascribed predominantly to failures of nation-building.[5]

There is a special category of secure weak state where failure is imminent, but forestalled or prevented by the iron yoke with which the state burdens and confines its people. This kind of autocratic nation-state rigidly controls dissent, imposes conformity and collective punishment, sometimes uses food scarcities to enhance its control, and often supplies to its people few if any tangible political goods (other than security). In extreme cases, such as Iraq under Saddam Hussein and North Korea under the Kims, there is little to the state other than its impressive security apparatus.[6]

Burma is another special and instructive case. On the one hand, Burma provides very few political goods to its citizens, being backward in terms of education, health, rule of law, economic opportunity, and political freedom. On the other hand, Burma is very

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[5] Rotberg, "Failure and Collapse," 5.
[6] For North Korea, see Marcus Noland, "North Korea: the Tyranny of Deprivation," in Rotberg (ed.),*Worst of the Worst: Dealing with Repressive and Rogue Nations* (Washington, D. C., 2007), 89-114.

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secure; its military rulers are powerful and controlling. Thus, Burma is failed in every respect but the last. So it can be called a weak state with a hollow center. In other words, Burma, like North Korea and Turkmenistan, two other Asian despotisms, escapes the label failed only because it as a nation-state fully monopolizes all legitimate uses of violence. Its tyrannical security saves it from failure, as did Saddam Hussein's Iraq until after the flawed United States intervention in 2003.

Burma, in common with all failed and near-failed states, has been taken to the precipice of failure by human agency. No structural deficits or institutional deficiencies doomed Burma. Nor have natural disasters or geographical constraints contributed to Burma's descent down the slide from strength to the pit of weakness and the edge of failure. We cannot ascribe Burma's current condition to the policies of British colonial rule or to the crimes and high-placed collaborators of the Japanese occupation.

Burma was a once rich and well-educated nation-state that had fallen on hard times. After a very brief period of largely participatory rule and good governance (1948 to 1958), it was run first by General Ne Win, an idiosyncratic autocrat and previous collaborator with the Japanese occupiers. From 1962 to 1988 he isolated and systematically de-developed his previously proud nation-state on the eastern flank of India and Bangladesh and the southern periphery of China. For reasons of ideology, numerology, paranoia, and power, he pursued a policy of rigorous autarky, ending much of Burma's historic participation in world trade and global intellectual capital. Autarky still prevails, along with strong considerations of paranoia and power.

Ne Win was deposed by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), a tightly disciplined military junta, in 1988. Earlier that year, students and Buddhist monks led a widespread uprising against Ne Win's capricious rule. About 1000 protesters were gunned down in Rangoon. Later in the same year, the SLORC

slaughtered another 3000 activists in Rangoon, Mandalay, Sagaing, and other towns. About 10,000 students and monks fled. Subsequently, the SLORC ruled Burma under martial law until agreeing to a popular election in 1990. To the somehow over-confident or blinded SLORC's apparent surprise and consternation, Burmese voted overwhelmingly in favor of the cause championed by the students and monks, and thus for the new National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. However, her victorious coalition was not allowed to occupy the parliamentary seats that it had won; she and her closest political colleagues were soon jailed. Since 1990, the SLORC, in 1997 renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has continued to govern Burma, keeping Suu Kyi almost always under house arrest and real democracy (not the staged variety) dormant. However, the SPDC has improved relations with many of the dissident ethnic groups that occupy territory on the edges of the Burman heartland; various long-running conflicts between the central government and minority-dominated provinces have ended. The country is stable, post-Cyclone Nargis as before, even if or because its peoples are repressed and held hostage by corrupt soldiers who deny nearly all Burmese free expression, individual entrepreneurial opportunity, political participation, access to the wider world through travel or the internet, advanced education of all kinds, more than rudimentary health care, and the pursuit of any goals that are not specifically sanctioned by General Than Shwe, head of the steely junta. Burma. In other words, Burma is orderly and rigorously organized, but the 43 to 52 million citizens of the country (no one knows the exact number) receive almost no other political goods. If it were embroiled in an ongoing civil war it could be definitively classified as failed, but with enforced conformity more common than rebellion, it remains one of those southern Asian nations poised mightily to fail. North Korea can be described in similar terms.

Failure Described

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Failed states victimize their own citizens. As in the Taliban's Afghanistan, rulers oppress, extort, and control their own compatriots while privileging a favored ethnic, linguistic, or religious cohort. Failed states cannot control their own hinterlands, and sometimes one or more of their internal regions. They frequently cannot express real power beyond a capital city or an ethnically preferred area. In Sri Lanka, a weak state teetering for decades on the edge of failure before 2009, parts of its north and parts of its east had not been subject to central government hegemony for the better part of thirty years.

In failed states, inflation grows, corruption flourishes, and economic growth shrinks. Officials loot the state. Goods grow scarce in the stores. Sometimes, as in Cambodia and Zimbabwe, segments of the population are deprived of food and go hungry or starve. Criminal violence is prevalent. As state authority lessens and becomes simultaneously more criminal, so lawlessness spreads. Criminal gangs proliferate. Arms and drugs trafficking intensifies. Counterfeiting and illicit arms sales grow. For protection, ordinary citizens naturally turn, as in post-Saddam Iraq, to incipient warlords.

Many weak states have flawed communication and transportation infrastructures. In failed states, these blemishes become catastrophes, with roads returning to tracks and potholes swallowing highways. Electric power is overtaken by outages. Fixed telephone lines become anachronistic. Effective educational and medical systems become dysfunctional, with once prized institutions being deprived of budgetary cash or foreign exchange. Hospitals run short of medicines and bandages, even sutures. Schools lack teachers and textbooks. Literacy rates slide and infant mortality numbers soar. Life expectancies plummet from the 60s to the 30s. Gradually citizens, especially rural dwellers, realize that the (distant) central government has abandoned them to the

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capricious and harsh forces of nature. Many Pakistanis and North Koreans presumably sense this abandonment.

Above all, a nation-state fails when it loses legitimacy – when it forfeits "the mandate of heaven." [7] When citizens finally perceive that the rulers are running the state as a criminal enterprise for themselves as sole beneficiaries – when citizens realize that the state no longer cares about most of its inhabitants – then nearly everyone understands that the social contract binding rulers to ruled and vice versa has been irreparably breached. Allegiances are then transferred to non-state actors.

The Classic Cases

Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Iraq, and the Sudan, all enmeshed in one or more enduring conflict, are classical failed states. They are failed because of their intrinsic insecurities as well as because each is unable to supply more than a paucity of the other necessary political goods to their inhabitants. Each contains at least one, if not several, ongoing insurgencies. Death rates as a result of civil warfare are high, and comparatively easy to quantify. Human security (safety of persons and freedom from crime) is almost wholly absent. None of these nation-states boasts more than a rudimentary rule of law or protections for human rights. Human development attainments such as educational opportunity, health care, access to potable water, and so on are weak; life expectancy rates are low or falling. Growth rates and per capita GDP numbers are rising in the case of Afghanistan and the Sudan, largely because of poppy sales and foreign aid in the case of Afghanistan and oil and remittances in the case of the Sudan, but the other classical failed states are more often mired in poverty.

It is easy to classify such typical failed states since all but the two special cases show declining outcomes and outputs (the preferred measurements) combined with

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[7] See also Michael D. Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Beliefs Behind the Man* (Richmond, Surrey, UK, 2000), 218.

massive internal combustion and confrontation. It is tougher to parse the borderline cases. Is Nigeria about to fail? Or Papua New Guinea? Or Kenya? Answering such questions illuminates the theory and the distinctions that should be made in attempting – for purposes of crafting better policies – to classify such cases.

Sri Lanka, after all, was engulfed in a civil war since the early 1970s. For many years in recent decades the LTTE managed to create a de facto autonomous enclave in the north and part of the east of the country, to survive intervention by Indian troops, and to outmaneuver the Sri Lankan army and navy on numerous occasions. About 90,000 Sri Lankans have died as a result of such internecine warfare since the start of hostilities in the 1970s. In terms of the security political good, Sri Lanka clearly was considered failed.

Through suicide and other bombings, the LTTE on occasion carried the war for autonomy or Tamil independence in the north and east to Colombo, the capital, and to Sinhalese dominated areas in the west and south of the island country. Those areas, roughly 80 percent of the country, however, were largely free of all but such episodic involvement in the civil war. Nevertheless, in order to decide whether Sri Lanka was in 2000-2008 a failed or a weak state, it is important to focus first on the provision of political goods in the major portions of the nation-state that were spared all but infrequent engagement in the ongoing conflict. In 80 percent of the country, we found in those years very high levels of the delivery of the other political goods – human development, sustainable economic opportunity, participation and human rights, and rule of law. Indeed, despite its continuing civil war, the Sri Lankan government was delivering to its citizens comparatively robust qualities and quantities of these essential political goods. GDP levels were high for South Asia. So were participation rates, educational accomplishments, medical care, life expectancy levels, judicial independence, and so on.

That these numbers fell off dramatically in the north and east, where less than 20 percent of the population, nearly all Tamil-speaking, lived, made Sri Lanka a special case of a weak, almost a strong, state encapsulating a zone of failure. Indonesia was classified in that same general way in 2004 – as a near failure saved by high levels of political goods in 80 percent of the vast archipelago, before – under new leadership -- it negotiated peace in Aceh, dampened the rumbling conflicts in the Maluku Islands, and reduced hostilities in Papua (Irian Jaya).[8] Then, as a result, it became a weak nation-state, gaining strength and not tending toward failing or failure.

Until 2008, Nepal had been another classical failure. After the monarchy's loss of legitimacy and the broad rise of the Maoist insurgency, in 2004, Nepal had shifted from being an endemically weak state, with few political goods for its citizens, to a failed one riven by civil war. But since the negotiated end of the war, and elections in 2007, Nepal once again returned to weakness. That is, so long as hostilities are suspended, the nation-state's abysmal provision of political goods keeps it on the edge of failure, but not failed. Renewed fighting would once again tip it over the edge.

Pakistan is a very special case. Given that sections of the country are not completely under the control of the central government, and thus in breach of the control of the instruments of violence that is fundamental to the security good, failure is a strong possibility. When one combines that categorization with the sheer casualty count from suicide and other bombings, or from clashes between the Pakistani-based Taliban and internal or external security forces, it is clear that a good case can begin to be made that Pakistan, big and wealthy as it is, and with nuclear weapons, should also be considered a failed state. But a large swathe of the country has Sri Lankan aspects. There educational

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[8] Michael Malley, "Indonesia: The Erosion of State Capacity," in Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington, D. C., 2003), 183-218.

and health services are being provided at more than minimal levels, participation levels since former President Pervez Musharraf's authoritarian rule was relaxed in 2007 are reasonable, the rule of law is at least discussable, and the economy is moving forward albeit not thriving.

A careful quantitative assessment, and a comparison of that assessment to the countries in the rest of Asia and the rest of South Asia, would help determine - for external and internal policy purposes – exactly where Pakistan lies along the strong-collapse continuum. That careful quantitative assessment cannot be offered here for lack of data. But were it to be obtained, we might be able to concentrate the minds of Pakistanis and outsiders either on its failure or its near failure. Either way, its governmental actions and the actions of its neighbors, and the West, would be influenced.

After all, it is not only in the sometime geographical expression of Somalia – a collapsed state – that nonstate actors proliferate and warlords prevail. The inability of Islamabad to project power beyond the Punjabi heartland differs strikingly from that of Pyongyang. Pakistan is different from Somalia, which is nothing more than a geographical expression. All Somalia has is its internationally accepted territorial borders. Nothing else exists, hence its characterization as a collapsed polity. Warlords or the Shabab (nonstate actors) do provide some security in the cities and districts that they control. Mosques and clans have organized a modicum of schooling, and there are shari'a courts in parts of the territory. Otherwise, however, there are no political goods and those that do exist are not provided by a recognized nation-state (even in Somaliland, which is far from failed, but unrecognized internationally). Pakistan, a much stronger state, still exhibits Somali-like tendencies in the Northwest Frontier provinces of South and North Waziristan, and in large parts of Baluchistan.

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As a policy tool, a careful (quantitatively-based) method of assessing the character of a nation-state should drive policy both internally and from the outside. By appreciating why a state like Nepal, which delivers very few political goods to its people, stays weak, but can easily cross back into failure, and why and how much more effective nation-states like Sri Lanka and Indonesia might fail, but have not, it is possible to prescribe remedies, call for outside assistance in one or more areas, or focus the attention of the United Nations and developed, donor countries. Pakistan is another South Asian nation-state where failure was unthinkable until late 2008 or early 2009, with the global financial crisis and intensified insurgency making the unthinkable plausible, absent decisive presidential leadership or internal military intervention. Indeed, in devising ways to assist Nepal and Pakistan, and even Sri Lanka or Bangladesh, it is wise to learn why and how collapsed states like Lebanon in the 1970s, Tajikistan in the 1990s, and Sierra Leone and Liberia in the 1990s and in this century were able to un-collapse and un-fail themselves with significant security assistance (respectively from Syria, Russia, Britain, and the United Nations) and, once secure, with massive outside governance assistance.[9] Their experiences bear many lessons for polities like Nepal and Timor Leste, as well as for countries in Central, South, and Southeast Asia (and elsewhere) now at risk of failure.

Because of their demonstrated weaknesses as providers of rule of law, human rights and participation, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development (in each case the numbers and rankings are low), nation-states such as Kyrgystan, Tajikistan, Laos, and Papua New Guinea are in 2009 each at risk of failure if and when civil wars resume or break out. The first two, with their fundamental regional and political antagonisms, are held together only by thin levels of comity and the possibility of Russian intervention. Laos has experienced interregional and interethnic violence before;

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[9] Oren Barak, "Lebanon: Failure, Collapse, and Resuscitation," in ibid, 305-340.

if the grip of its communist rulers weaken, hostilities are likely again. PNG has among the worst crime rates in the world, and nearly 200 fractious ethnicities on the main island plus dissidents (who have warred against the main island) on outer islands. PNG, wildly corrupt as well, is held together mainly by the possibility of Australian intervention. Fortunately, for diagnostic and policy purposes, we can quantify the levels of governance of each of these places and thus approximately assess the risks to each.

Actions of Leaders

It is important to classify nation-states in this way: strong, weak, failing, failed, and collapsed. Doing so helps to distinguish the quality of nation-states in the developing world in order to respond to their needs, to prevent them from descending from strength to weakness and failure, and to rebuild the ones that are eventually overwhelmed by outright failure. Good policy decisions flow from an appreciation of the differences between these kinds of nation-states and especially of how certain kinds of weak nation-states in the developing world are driven by their leaders into the full embrace of failure.

Nation-states do not become failed. Instead, they are failed by the purposeful actions of a leader or leaders. Presidents Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire/Congo, Siaka Stevens in Sierra Leone, Samuel Doe and Charles Taylor in Liberia, Gaafar Nimeiri in the Sudan, and Idi Amin in Uganda (to mention only a few of those personally culpable, like Burma's Ne Win, for nation-state decline and decay), plus Mullah Muhammad Omar in Afghanistan, are all examples of depraved leaders who systematically deprived their constituents of fundamental political goods, ultimately even the overriding political good of security. The Kims can join this group. They each provoked or demanded civil strife in

order to profit from the resulting insecurity or otherwise drove their loyal and long-suffering citizens into rebellion by acts of commission and omission.[10]

Likewise, democratic or quasi-democratic leadership – at a minimum, non-despotic leadership – helps to explain why nation-states avoid outright failure. Pakistan under the politicians, corrupt as they are, might therefore be able to avoid tumbling into failure. Nepal has emerged from failure because of compromises negotiated by leaders at the end (?) of a civil war; whether the country can avoid lurching back into failure depends entirely on leadership decisions, not on structure. The antagonistic and heavy-handed leadership of the Bandaranaikes, husband and widow, brought about the long Sri Lankan struggle between Tamil separatists and the state. Their successors, including a Bandaranaike daughter, sometimes worsened the conflict by their actions, sometimes moderated it, including establishing the long "cease-fire" of 2006-2008. But peace in Sri Lanka now demands new leadership qualities on the government side with the shift away from the unflinching, desperado command of the LTTE.

Effective, participatory, honest leadership, or the lack thereof, also was decisive throughout Bangladesh's short history, especially during the recent reigns of Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia. The intervention of General Moeen U. Ahmad in 2007 brought a new kind of discipline and probity (without much participation) to the affairs of Bangladesh. Whether his relatively brief interregnum until 2009 was long enough or instructive enough to alter the course of modern Bangladeshi politics is still unclear. But, unlike Musharraf, he was determined not to overstay his welcome and to attempt bravely

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[10] For elaboration and detail, see the essays in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington, D. C., 2003).

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to usher in a new approach to political responsibility and behavior. He believed in stewardship, and in doing what was right for Bangladesh, not for his kinsmen or families.

An Instructive Case

A detailed appreciation of the actions of leaders such as those mentioned in the prior section, year after year, would demonstrate the dynamics of failure and occasional success, and how failure is caused by avarice and design, not by inadvertence. But none is still in office and many are dead. Instead, our analysis of the critical influence of leadership decisions and motivations on state failure is well illustrated by a non-South Asian example – a contemporary instance of purposeful predation – the case of President Robert Gabriel Mugabe and desperately failing but not yet fully failed Zimbabwe.[11]

When Africans finally created a free new nation of Zimbabwe in 1980, Mugabe became first its prime minister and then its president. He gradually gathered all of the reins of power into his own hands. Nevertheless, for much of the country's first eighteen years, nearly all important political goods --- security, rule of law, economic opportunity, infrastructural provisions, education, health, and the empowerment of civil society – were delivered in reasonable abundance. Mugabe indeed provided very high levels of educational opportunity, good medical services, abundant state security, low rates of crime, and excellent roads and other arteries of commerce. Corruption existed, but was held in check. Economic growth was mostly strong, based on solid macroeconomic and microeconomic fundamentals, a well organized monetary and banking system, and a comparatively open trading system. Only freedom to campaign politically against

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[11] See also Robert I. Rotberg, "Africa's Mess, Mugabe's Mayhem," *Foreign Affairs* (August 2000), XX;

Rotberg, "Winning the Prize for African Repression: Zimbabwe," in Rotberg (ed.), *Worst of the Worst: Dealing with Repressive and Rogue Nations* (Washington, D. C., 2007), 166-192.

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Mugabe and the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) was curtailed, with increasing severity. There was freedom of expression in daily life (unlike Burma), but Mugabe's regime either owned or controlled all radio, television, and press outlets. Thus accountability was limited, even though the judicial system remained independent.

This relatively satisfactory and stable arrangement, with Mugabe running a strong government and increasingly intimidating or otherwise marginalizing a few brave African opponents, unraveled during in the late 1990s. Mugabe started looting the coffers of the state, permitting his relatives and associates to exceed previous levels of greed. Corruption ran rampant; citizens became increasingly cynical where previously they had been loyal and supportive. As Mugabe's legitimacy eroded, he sent 13,000 soldiers into the Democratic Republic of the Congo to support another dictator. That costly maneuver, done without parliamentary approval, bankrupted Zimbabwe. Consumer shortages of fuel and staple commodities followed. The population grew restive and rejected a constitutional referendum, favored by Mugabe, early in 2000.

As Mugabe grew more threatened and angry, he unleashed a wave of thugs (so-called war veterans) against white (and sometimes black) commercial farmers – the collective backbone of the national economy. As 4000 white farmers were forced off their farms, production plummeted and 400,000 African farm workers lost their sources of employment. The national economy naturally fell backward, especially after Mugabe rigged or otherwise stole the parliamentary elections of 2000 and 2005 and the presidential poll of 2002, thus denying an emergent opposition any opportunity to put Zimbabwe back on the path of prosperity and economic sanity.

The blatant theft of the 2008 presidential election runoff, coming after a loss to Morgan Tsvangirai in the first electoral round of 2008 and the confirmed loss of a

parliamentary majority to Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), accompanied inflation rates of more than 12 million percent per year, massive assaults on backers of Tsvangirai, and the thorough-going collapse of the country's certainly failed economy.

Zimbabwe, a strong state by African and developing world standards until 1998, descended rapidly in this century into weakness and to the very brink of failure. Numbers tell the story. From 1998 through 2008, thanks to Mugabe's depredations, annual GDP per capita in Zimbabwe slumped from $800 to $200. A country once growing at a steady 5 percent a year went backwards by 40 to 50 percent in that period. About 80 percent of all adult Zimbabweans were unemployed by 2005. The local dollar, once stronger than the US dollar, and in 1998 trading at about $Z38 to US$1, steadily collapsed to a 2008 level of $Z 18 billion to $US 1.

Equally important, from 2000 the country's once vaunted rule of law broke down. Mugabe began interfering openly in the courts in 1999 and refused thereafter to abide by their decisions. Torture of opponents occurred. The presses of the only independent daily newspaper were bombed, and that paper was later banned. Hospitals stopped providing medicines, or even bandages. Schools lost teachers and textbooks and fell into disuse. A superbly maintained road network decayed. There were periodic shortages of fundamental consumer goods. Indeed, since early 2004, Zimbabwe has experienced serious food scarcities and pockets of extreme hunger and starvation. In 2005, Mugabe -- later condemned in a UN report -- unleashed a reign of terror on urban shanty dwellers, most of whom presumably backed the opposition political party. As many as 700,000 Zimbabweans lost their homes and small businesses, being forced to flee in the deep cold of winter into rural areas where there was no work and little food. Possibly the strongest indication of Zimbabwe's near failure, however, is reflected in its alarming emigration

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statistics. At least 3 million Zimbabweans (of a nation of 12 million) since 2002 have fled the country for South Africa, Botswana, and Mozambique.

As early as 2005, Zimbabwe was racing pell-mell toward failure. The state's delivery of most political goods had virtually ceased. All kinds of numbers pointed to the parlous quality of state services, and to the deep immiseration – a typical indication of failure or near failure -- of the citizens of Zimbabwe. However, the state still controlled the exercise of legitimate and illegitimate sources of violence. Although everyone was preyed upon, and Mugabe's opponents were pilloried and repressed, the state projected power throughout the entire country and forcibly prevented rebellion and waves of protest. It did the same between the two 2008 elections, organizing a Thermidor-like reign of antagonistic terror. The regime remained too strong for a velvet or orange revolution. When this situation changes, and civil war breaks out between Mugabe loyalists and regime opponents, then Zimbabwe (like so many other weak and failing states) can be called fully failed.

Preventing Failure

These distinctions are more than arbitrary or academic. They differentiate situations that threaten world order from those that are deteriorating but remain mostly of serious local or regional concern. Without weapons of mass destruction, these Zimbabwe-like imploding states are usually threats only to themselves and their unfortunate inhabitants. In terms of the 2005 Responsibility to Protect UN resolution, each of these cases where presidents willfully destroy their own states and the livelihoods and social welfare of millions of their own constituents rightfully should compel a regional- or a UN-supervised intervention, but usually will not. As the *Boston Globe* once editorialized: "Millions of people in the world need a UN that is willing and able to protect them from their rulers – instead of protecting those rulers from outside

interference in their internal affairs."[12] The UN and larger powers usually wait to become involved until intrastate hostilities become too hot, and too many people die, or until foreign nationals are threatened. By then, as in Zimbabwe or Darfur, or earlier in Liberia and Sierra Leone, it is far too late. Because of its nuclear pretensions, North Korea is in a special category of its own: dangerous, disturbing, but without open unrest.

Governance, i.e., how a nation-state performs for its citizens – how it delivers high quality political goods—is among the key responsibilities of the international system. International or regional organizations cannot govern individual nation-states. But they can set standards and find the means through Chapter VII of the UN Charter or through new understandings collectively arrived at to chastise those leaders and regimes who prey on their own citizens and govern so corruptly and cravenly that they create failure. What is important is that the United Nations and its key leaders refuse to tolerate tyranny and instead speak out strongly against infractions and miscreants – that they demonstrate political will sufficient to decry lapses of standards, abuse of norms of governance, and mobilize public diplomacy, sanctions, and intervention actions to save innocent civilians in despotic countries from their despots. Thus far, however, neither the UN Secretary General nor leaders of the G8 have been willing systematically to mobilize world public opinion for such objectives, much less act directly against the Kim Jong-Ils, Than Shwes, or Robert Mugabes of the world. From this perspective, even the unilateral attack on Saddam Hussein came decades too late. World order and the UN, its proxy, should have acted immediately after the gassing of thousands of innocent Kurds in Halabja in 1988. Admittedly, had it not been for Russian and Chinese vetoes, the UN Security Council might have mandated strict sanctions on Zimbabwe in 2008.

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[12] "Annan's New Direction," *Boston Globe*, 30 July 2005

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This analysis of strong, weak, failed, and collapsed nation-states can be utilized to provide early indicators of crisis. Just as it has been possible month by month and year by year to chart Zimbabwe's regression from strength to weakness and near failure, and to use a variety of simple statistics to plot the national slippage toward failure, so it is possible to use a set of proxy measures to watch all weak states for signs of impending trouble. Efforts at prevention by international bodies, or by neighboring coalitions, would then be possible.

There are several kinds of preventive tools that are available, if employed before a crisis erupts into full-scale failure and outright conflict. Preventive diplomacy is always relevant, either 1) quiet, private discussions by senior figures in a region or globally, or 2) internationally-arranged missions capable of counseling strong leaders or mediating between leaders and opponents. Sanctions of various kinds are available. So is the mobilization of a rapid reaction force capable of interposing itself between contenders. Overall, the responsibility to protect should arouse Security Council declarations and the dispatch of peacekeepers or peace enforcers.

The declaration of a full humanitarian emergency obviously motivates these kinds of actions. But, well before a state fails and conflict erupts, the available numbers report exactly what is happening to a state. Simultaneously, local observers understand the increasing seriousness of a state being plunged into the abyss of de-development and incipient failure, and can confirm what the numbers suggest in a stark and recognizable form. The qualitative and quantitative assessments of impending failure (as in Cote d'Ivoire on the eve of its swift slide from strength to failure in 2001) in turn depend on an awareness of the utility of a new definition of governance.

The failure and collapse of nation-states is a dynamic process. Little is foreordained. No matter how impoverished a state may be, it need not fail. The origins

of a state, whether arbitrary or absent-minded (as in much of colonialism), again do not predispose to, or fully account for, failure. States born weak and forlorn, such as Botswana, have emerged strong and high-performing as a consequence of gifted leadership, and not primarily as a result of a subsequent resource bonanza. Wealth must be well-managed and distributed genuinely if a nation-state, such as Nigeria or Equatorial Guinea, is to emerge from weakness and become stronger; otherwise there is always the possibility of slippage (as in Nigeria in the 1980s) and failure. In other words, the road to failure is littered with serious mistakes of omission and commission. Where, especially in fragile, isolated states in the developing world, there is little accountability and no political culture of democracy, these errors of commission are almost always made for personal gain by leaders. Human agency drives and accounts for failure, or near failure, as in the ongoing cases of Zimbabwe and Cote d'Ivoire, as in Mobutu's Congo, and as in Idi Amin's Uganda. Likewise, nation-states strengthen under positive leadership for good, as in President John Kufuor's Ghana, Nelson Mandela's South Africa, and Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam's Mauritius.

State failure, in other words, is largely man made, not accidental.[13] Cultural clues are relevant, but are inadequate to explain persistent leadership attributes or flaws. Likewise, institutional fragilities and structural weaknesses accelerate failure, but such deficiencies stem from decisions or actions of men (sometimes women, too, as in South Asia). In the absence of implanted democratic political cultures, greed explains more about malign leadership action than do structural or institutional insufficiencies.

Thus it is leadership error that destroyed or fractured nation-states for personal and political gain. Just think of what the Bandaranaikes did in Sri Lanka or the Bhuttos in Pakistan. Solomon and Sirimavo Bandaranike, one after the other, drove the LTTE

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[13] This and several succeeding paragraphs draw on the argument originally advanced in Rotberg, "Failure and Collapse," in Rotberg, *When States Fail*, 25-27.

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into reactive combat by abrogating minority rights and vitiating the implicit social contract on which the country had been established. The pre-existing constitutional and institutional barriers to such behavior proved too fragile to constrain determined executive action, as similarly in Sri Lanka, Zaire/Congo, and even in Zimbabwe where, in 2009, Mugabe was still by fiat overruling regional judicial judgments against him. In Afghanistan, one of the continuing failed states, Gulbuddin Hakmatyar and Burrhan ul-Din Rabani attempted to prevent Afghans other than their own Pushtun and Tajik kin from sharing the perquisites of governance. Their own narrowly focused, self-enriching decisions enabled the Taliban to follow them in triumph in the 1990s; Afghanistan then descended into all-out terror and collapse.

Wherever there has been state failure or collapse, human agency has engineered the slide from strength or from weakness, and rulers have willfully presided over destabilizing resource shifts from the state to the ruling few. As those resource transfers grew more potent, and human rights abuses mounted, countervailing violence signified the extent to which the states in question had sundered underlying social contracts and become hollow receptacles of personalistic privilege, private rule, and national immiseration. Inhabitants of failed states hence came to appreciate what it meant for their lives to be poor, nasty, brutish, and short (as national numbers demonstrate).

Failure, it should be said, does not creep stealthily into the domain of a body politic. Its pending arrival is there for all to see – if they would but notice. Three kinds of signals – economic, political, and military – provide clear, timely, and actionable warnings. On the economic front, for example, Lebanon in 1972-1979, Nigeria in 1993-1999, Indonesia in 1997-1999, Pakistan in 2008-2009, and Zimbabwe in 1998-2008 each provided ample early warning signals. In each case, rapid reductions in income and living

standards presaged the possibility of failure early enough to have been noted and for preventive measures to have been encouraged from outside or explored from within.

The Downward Spiral

Once the downward spiral starts in earnest, only a concerted, determined effort can slow its momentum. Corrupt autocrats and their equally corrupt associates usually have few incentives to arrest their state's slide. They themselves find clever ways to benefit from impoverishment and misery; they are not the ones to suffer. As foreign and domestic investment dries up, jobs vanish, and per capita incomes fall, the mass of citizens in an imperiled state see their health, educational, and infrastructural entitlements erode. Food and fuel shortages occur. Privation and hunger follow. Typically, as the poor get poorer, ruling cadres get richer. State treasuries are skimmed, currency perquisites are employed for private gain, illicit gun- and narco-trafficking increases in scale, and secret funds flow out of the country into private structures and non-public bank accounts.

In the political realm, too, available indicators are abundant. Maximum leaders and their associates subvert democratic norms, restrict participatory processes of all kinds, coerce civil society, and override institutional checks and balances supposedly secure in legislatures and bureaucracies. They curtail judicial independence, harass the media, and suborn security forces. In other words, rulers show more and more contempt for their own nationals, surround themselves with family, lineage, or ethnic allies, and greatly narrow the focus of their concern and responsibility.   Many of these arrogant leaders grandly drive down national boulevards in massive motorcades, commandeer national commercial aircraft for foreign excursions, put their faces prominently on national currencies and in private as well as public places, and are seemingly convinced – as was Louis XIV - that the state and the riches of the state are theirs personally to dispose.

A third indicator is derived directly from levels of violence. If they rise precipitously because of conflicts or outright civil war, the state clearly is crumbling. As national human security levels decline, the probability of failure increases. Not every civil conflict precipitates failure, but each offers a warning sign. Indeed, absolute or relative crime rates and civilian combat death counts cannot prescribe failure conclusively. But they do indicate that a society is deteriorating and that the glue that binds a new or an old state is becoming dangerously thin.

There are implicit tipping points. Yet, even as a weak state is becoming a failing state and seemingly plunging rapidly toward failure, desperate descents can be arrested by timely external diplomatic or military intervention. Usually, however, those interventions are too timid and tepid, or much too late. Hundreds of thousands thus die, as in Cambodia, East Timor, Rwanda, the Sudan (and Darfur), the Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Lebanon. Many thousands of others flee their homes for sanctuaries or refugee camps. Afghanistan and Pakistan are experiencing some of this flight, and killings if on a reduced scale.

There is a better way, and Responsibility to Protect in theory offers a firm guide to what is needed and should be done. Under the governing two paragraphs, a responsibility to protect would be triggered by a Secretary-General's request to the UN Security Council. That would condition a strengthened UN security apparatus, and an enlarged Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to intervene diplomatically and militarily if and when nation-states should slip toward failure. There would thus be a proactive accelerator for action. Doing so now depends more on individual national initiative than on the UN, as witnessed after the Burmese cyclone, the 2007 Kenyan election, or the 2008 second Zimbabwean election. If Responsibility to Protect is

developed, the importance of sovereignty will be balanced judiciously against the need to protect innocent lives in nation-states that are failing.

If nation-states do continue to stumble and fail, as they will, then world order has a responsibility to resuscitate and reconstruct them. In post-conflict situations there is an urgent humanitarian as well as an explicit security need for conscientious, well-crafted nation building – for a systematic refurbishing of the political, economic, and social fabric of countries that have crumbled, that have failed to perform and to provide political goods of quality and in quantity, and that have become threats to themselves and to others. Good governance needs to be reintroduced into polities that have failed. Legal systems need to be recreated. Economies need to be restored.

The examples of Tajikistan and Lebanon, two failed states that have recovered to the point of weakness and strength, respectively, demonstrate that it can be done.[14] Furthermore, the accomplishments of the UN transitional administrations in Cambodia and East Timor, and of the NATO/EU/UN interim administration in Kosovo, suggest that effective post-conflict nation building is possible if there is sufficient political will and targeted and well-funded external aid.

Reconstruction

Too often, the reconstruction process is half-hearted or rushed, or both. Interim administrations are understandably anxious to complete their ostensible missions and leave. So they prefer short-term fixes to sustainable, long-term efforts of real nation-building. Effective, enduring resuscitation (as in today's southern Sudan or Aceh) requires creating or restoring capacities for security, for governance, and for institution building. Doing so often takes a generation, or more.

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[14] For these instructive cases, see Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness,* 245-264, 305-339.

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The hierarchy of reconstruction is based on experience and on an understanding of the components of good governance. A lasting cease-fire must be achieved first, before any other improvements can be introduced. An interposing force, or some other buffering method, must be found to sustain the cease-fire, avoid skirmishes, and remove fear. Then it becomes imperative to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate combatants, a critical endeavor that, if imperfectly accomplished, hinders if not overwhelms other rebuilding initiatives. Mozambique's resuscitation was measurably assisted in the early 1990s by a particularly effective process of demobilization and disarmament; a skillful effort at reintegration was essential to success in Mozambique and to Mozambique's subsequent peaceful political and economic evolution.   There, and elsewhere, effective removal of leftover land mines, a thorough collection of weapons caches, and other fear-reduction efforts are critical components of a nation-state's recovery from war; often economic recovery depends on such comprehensive, transparent, activities. Reducing the daily availability of small arms – a much tougher and more intractable task – is also critical. Thus effective disarmament – an opportunity missed in Somalia and Cambodia – is fundamental to this stage of recovery. So is a method of reintroducing ex-combatants into civil society and productive agricultural or urban employment - an endeavor of years, not days.

Before a peace process can be transformed into a rebuilding endeavor, any transitional governing body must be able to deliver the key political good of security. Roads must be made safe for commerce and travelers. In Sierra Leone, only the arrival of British paratroopers and UN peacekeepers restored that failed state's sense of internal security (in 2002).   Only the intervention of the Syrian army in 1979 enabled Lebanon to begin to build itself back from collapse to failure, to weakness, and then to strength. In

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Tajikistan, Russian soldiers provided the necessary glue in the aftermath of its long civil war.

Without fundamental law and order, nation building is hopeless. But once stability and confidence have been at least partially restored, and citizens begin to have a measure of hope that their lives will improve, transitional agencies and international administrations can together focus on three primary and parallel goals: re-introducing the rule of law, jump-starting battered economies, and rejuvenating civil society. In the economic arena, it is imperative to re-implant fiscal and macroeconomic stability, manage the money supply, pay civil servants and security officers, and put people to work.   East Timor, for example, would not have begun to recover if in the very first weeks after Australian troops restored order in 1999, U. S. officials had not devised a means to employ thousands of Timorese on road, school, and other physical reconstruction projects.

Without such accomplishments, a new probity, and a coming sense of prosperity, the local economy will languish and continue to reply on dubious exports like opium, blood diamonds, women, and children.[15]   Equally necessary for economic recovery and societal rebuilding is an enforceable code of laws. Doing so can come in stages, as human and physical capacities are rebuilt, but war-ravaged citizens will tentatively support reconstruction efforts only once they are certain that legal safeguards are in place and that legal redress will be available.

A functioning court system should be among the first political institutions to be reborn. Renewed police efforts are essential. So are refurbished roads and communications networks. Building or repairing radio transmitters, as in East Timor and Congo, is but one example of how the restoration of the provision of reliable information

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[15] See Robert I. Rotberg, "Renewing the Afghan State," in Rotberg (ed.), *Building a New Afghanistan* (Washington, D. C., 2007), 15-19.

assists the rebuilding and accountability processes. A central bank must be reorganized. Teachers and health workers must be hired and schools and hospitals rebuilt. Together, these and many other critical initiatives will reestablish a sense that a new government exists and has begun to work for, rather than against, a nation's people.

Another critical area of the rebuilding effort involves the training or retraining of personnel: police, judges, bureaucrats, and parliamentarians. The security forces have to be reconfigured. Once, but not before, these advances start to succeed, it will then become important to convene a constituent assembly to write a new constitution (Burma still has no legitimated constitution) and to anoint an indigenous government through well-prepared and well-supervised elections. Rushing forward into such national political contests is inadvisable before peace, law and order, economic recovery, and a capable administration are in place. Restoring the people's trust in the state is an essential platform for successful reconstruction.

When states fail and collapse, the process of disintegration mutilates institutions and destroys the underlying social contract between a government and its citizens. That is precisely why sustained nation building requires time, massive capacity for uplifting and reconfiguring, large sums from outside, debt relief, and serious measures of tutelage. Rich nations must not abandon state rebuilding efforts before the tough work is concluded – before a failed or collapsed state has functioned well for several years and has had its political, economic, and social health restored. The worst enemy of the reconstruction of failed states is a premature exit by international organizations and donors, as in Haiti and Somalia.

Asia in World Order

Numbers of nation-states will continue in this and succeeding decades to fail, i.e. to provide insufficient political goods to their citizens. They will do so by failing to

ensure security for the state and for individuals, by abrogating rules of law, by denying political freedoms and economic opportunities, by crippling infrastructures, and by making the lives and futures of their people physically and socially poorer.

When regimes create civil wars or otherwise prey in this manner on their citizens, world order is seriously compromised. For the sake of world order broadly, and for the general safety and well-being of other inhabitants of the world, it is therefore imperative that the United Nations and regional organizations develop a capacity that none now exercises   -- to intervene to protect the innocent and otherwise weak inhabitants of such threatened countries. How to generate the international political will sufficient to crack down sharply on regimes that cross a line of good governance is a task for the architects and enforcers of world order. So is defining in broad, acceptable terms where that line should be drawn and how and when its breaches should be condemned.

Asia is particularly at risk, given the prowess and power of non-state actors in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the failure of both governments effectively to provide qualitatively or quantitatively adequate levels of good governance to their citizens. That failure caps decades of regime failure in Afghanistan and at least one decade of weakness/failure in Pakistan. In both cases, as in Bangladesh, governance deficits stem originally from leadership mis-directions, not from structural flaws or post-colonial inheritances. Winning the war against insurgents in Sri Lanka has given President Mahinda Rajapakse's administration an opportunity to move that nation-state from a position of continued weakness to strength, providing that his administration can build on its newly established security to deliver good governance to all, and not just the major part, of the country. India is a special outlier, with several states delivering high orders of political good, others less so, but all within an encompassing framework of security, law, participation, human development, and, finally, sustainable economic opportunity.

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When and if there is a new dispensation in North Korea, all of these questions of reconstruction will arise.