

International Security, Multilateralism and World (Dis)Order: Is there a Southern Perspective? Conference at University Torcuato di Tello, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 16-17, 2007

Session III: State Crisis, Intra-state Conflict and the Deconstruction of Sovereignty

“The Labels Change; the Substance Remains:
a historical perspective on the concept of state failure,”

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I would like to begin my remarks with some comments on the research findings of this project, *State Crisis, International Governance and Security*, first, to say how helpful it has been to my own thinking, for example, to think more about the bases of U.S. foreign policy toward these subjects and to introduce a South American perspective into my own analyses of the concept of state failure, and second, to alert you in the audience to some of the genuine contributions to knowledge which its members are making. I select four examples related to the theme of this session which have been provoked by these project summaries.

(1) Juan Tokatlian argues in his paper¹ that the U.S. government needs to legitimize its intervention in the domestic affairs of another state. This tells us that there *are* some international norms that even this current US Administration appears to believe necessary to follow, even if only to reduce the costs of the action, and it tells us that the concept of “failed state” is especially effective in this legitimizing role because it is even stronger than the currently dominant principle, “Responsibility to Protect.” Labeling the target a failed state says, there is no longer any remaining sovereignty, *de facto*, to respect.

¹ “The Making of a ‘Failed State’ in World Politics: The Case for the United States – Colombia Relations.”

The research question I would propose from this is, does the particular justification used – failed state, state at risk of failing, fragile state, weapons of mass destruction, regime change, democracy promotion, and so forth -- tell us what kind of intervention it will be? Or what the consequences will be?

(2) Monica Hirst shows in her paper² that we need to analyze peacekeeping/peacebuilding operations from the analytical perspective of what Robert Putnam calls “two-level games” – not only analyzing the politics of the Security Council, such as on obtaining troops and defining the mandate, but also analyzing the domestic politics for troop contributing countries. Moreover, that what matters is not just their military doctrine, as we already know, for example, the differences on the use of force between the Nordic brigades or India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, on the one hand, and the United States, on the other, but also their domestic histories of military rule, civil war, and so forth, that matters in a peacekeeping operation.

The resulting research question for me would then be, does the outcome of a UN peacekeeping mission vary with different compositions of troop contributing countries?

(3) I am also intrigued by Monica Hirst’s argument for the Haiti mission that peacekeeping mandates are designed in general to end civil wars, not to address a situation like that of Haiti and so there was a constant tension between their mandate and what the ABC (Argentina, Brazil, Chile) troops, at least, found they had to address. Here, too, much research is invited, especially since there is so much variation in types of issues and causes of armed violence that a UN peacekeeping operation enters to address. What kinds of tensions arise between the substance of a Security Council mandate and

² “South American Intervention in Haiti.”

the nature of the problem faced, and is there an identifiable pattern of variation in state formation resulting from this conflict?

(4) In the summary of his paper, Fernando Porta argues that recent regional integration efforts in South America are an attempt to manage the destructive effects and risks of market-friendly reforms (often called neoliberalism or the Washington consensus). The scholarly literature richly supports the argument that the multilateral agenda of trade and investment and the loan conditionalities of the international financial institutions have overridden the development agenda while state crisis in all cases is related in some way to the resulting inability of states alone to provide public goods. Thus, as Porta argues, rethinking the appropriate role of regional organizations allows us to go beyond their traditional security or trade roles to ones that might compensate for the declining developmental and distributive roles of the state or that improve the structural economic conditions within which states have become so limited and, thus, to prevent and deal with state crisis directly.

The research question which this provokes is, can a comparative analysis of regional organizations – AU and NEPAD in Africa, ASEAN in East and Southeast Asia, the EU and NATO in Europe, and so forth – tell us what the limits are of such a rethink or what their potential is to manage the developmental costs and risks of neoliberal globalization?

I now want to turn again to the same question asked by Juan Tokatlian. Can we use the concept of failed or failing states to examine U.S. foreign policy, that is, the nature of its mechanisms for expansion in the current period and thus also the role of peacekeeping/peacebuilding missions to restore failed states and their causes and,

secondly, the potential of regional organizations to prevent or manage states in crisis? I also agree with him that the best way to do this is with a historical perspective, so that we can see more clearly what this concept and its agenda are really about and whether we are in the midst of a systemic change internationally as a result of U.S. responses to a “turbulent periphery,” as Roberto Russell proposes in his contribution to the project, or, as Mark Duffield’s new book³ puts it, the concept of failed states is to legitimize what Graham Harrison⁴ calls “contingent sovereignty,” that is, “a zone or frontier that is shaped by the interactions between national and international actors and institutions where the core economic and welfare functions of a population are now designed and managed by international actors and agencies” – or the US – to extend the West’s security frontier.

Duffield, like Tokatlian, insists on a historical perspective, seeing this approach as beginning in the early 1990s, that is, the immediate post-Cold War reshaping where “ungoverned territories,” in the US military term, take on strategic significance, but the tools evolve – first, only humanitarian, then by the end of the 1990s, it is development discourse (effective states are necessary to human security), and only after 9/11 is the discourse security. Yet, like Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton,⁵ and Paul MacDonald yesterday, Duffield also sees this rhetoric – difficult environments, countries under stress, poor performers, fragile states—as a continuation of colonial discourse from the 19th century and especially prominent in the 1950s-1960s.

³ *Development, Security, and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007)

⁴ *The World Bank and Africa: The construction of governance states* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2004).

⁵ “Historicising representations of ‘failed states’: beyond the cold-war annexation of the social sciences?” *Third World Quarterly* vol. 23, no. 1 (2002), pp. 55-80.

I, however, think that to answer the question about what is going on now, whether there has been a change, and, if the term failed state *is* on the decline if it is no longer used in policy, will this also reflect or foretell another change in policy, then we need to go back to 1945-48. We can then show, I would argue, that the labels may change, but the substance of US policy has not. (Perhaps more interesting now is why the British, especially the UK Department for International Development [DFID], and to a large extent also the German government – are equally so engaged in this rhetoric and policy to link development and security, or securitize development, through the concept of states in crisis or fragile states.)

This policy, the US construction of a new world order in John Ikenberry's sense⁶ after World War II, always had both components as Achin Vanaik has stressed – an economic and a security element. While we can focus on the creation of the United Nations at San Francisco in 1945 or the Bretton Woods institutions in 1944, far more revealing is 1947 – the Marshall Plan and NATO, “two halves of the same walnut,” as Michael Hogan puts it.⁷ The idea of US policy, as Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin argue in their insistence that the US is a very different kind of empire than what 19th century theorists, whether Lenin, Luxembour, or Hobson, analyzed: it would not be “imperialistic” but would create instead “allies from within.”⁸ That is, the Marshall Plan would transform domestic interests to ones naturally aligned with US economic interests through domestic political and economic reforms and then combine them in a collective-security alliance through NATO. The Marshall Plan policies were very similar to what

⁶ *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁷ *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁸ “Global Capitalism and American Empire,” *Socialist Register* 2004.

we now call neoliberalism – macroeconomic stabilization and structural adjustment reforms in exchange for aid – and democratization, in the sense of direct support for political parties of the center and right to improve their competitive position against the communist parties then popular with working-class voters, especially in Italy and France.

The Soviet Union pursued the same policy, particularly after the Tito-Stalin conflict of 1948, but the nonaligned movement also provided the political space for alternative domestic policies and institutions for many countries and thus a significant stabilizing mechanism in the otherwise polarized world of superpower competition. This balance is thrown off-kilter by the debt crisis of 1979-81, particularly when the victory of monetarism in the UK and the US brings a new phase of US-led pressure for domestic reform through the International Monetary Fund. The tightening screws of major commercial banks, and then in 1982 by ever more radical loan conditionality from the IMF, produces pressure not only for harsher macroeconomic stabilization, followed by World-Bank structural adjustment policies, but also political reforms to implement those economic policies. In terms, at least, of economic ideology, Francis Fukuyama appears to have been correct in his controversial 1991 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*: neoliberalism had won.

What then to do with the other half of the walnut, the security component of the transatlantic alliance? The evolution toward the concept of failed states and a policy aimed at domesticating the security half of a US-constructed global order which it represents, in my view, has a number of separate components. In 1991, as Michael Klare has shown, Colin Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, faced the dilemma of total victory: the Soviet enemy was no more; what enemy should he prepare the US

armed forces to fight in the future? The answer he gave was the concept of “rogue states.”⁹ Simultaneously, President George Bush, Sr. argued that NATO must remain as the collective security organization for Europe, but its European members should bear more of its financial burden, and similarly, world order elsewhere should be the increasing responsibility of regional powers, such as Turkey, and organizations, such as the OAU and OAS, a policy of broader “burden-sharing” which together he called the “new regionalism.”

At the same time, the wars in Somalia, Yugoslavia, and Rwanda, in particular, in the early 1990s persuaded many (wrongly it turned out in retrospect) that the real threat to international peace was now “ethnic conflict” and civil war. In response, the UN Security Council authorized ever more interventions for humanitarian and/or peacekeeping operations. Although the United States often sponsored these resolutions and interventions, it refused to contribute troops itself. “The new regionalism” applied here, too. These United Nations deployments became ever more “complex” and intrusive in reforming or reviving states and transforming civil order while the IMF and World Bank emphasis on state reform for economic liberalization (increasingly called “good governance”) added post-conflict reconstruction to this agenda. Thus, whether through UN auspices or IFI policies, both economic and security agendas focused increasingly on “security sector reform” to transform Cold-War militaries and cut military budgets. The movement by middle powers, such as Norway, Canada, and Japan, also in the mid-1990s, to argue that the end of the Cold War meant one could also end a militarized concept of security and refocus policy and resources onto “human security”

⁹ Michael T. Klare, “The New ‘Rogue State’ Doctrine,” *The Nation* May 8, 1995, pp. 625-28, “An Anachronistic Policy: The Strategic Obsolescence of the ‘Rogue Doctrine,’” *Harvard International Review* 22 (Summer 2000): 46-51; see also his book *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws* (Hill and Wang: 1995).

appeared to be a counterweight to the US concept of world order in which power was still defined in military terms but in which now US dominance had no rival. By 1999, however, the report of the Canadian-funded International Commission on State Sovereignty, *A Responsibility to Protect*, seems instead to have adopted the US position (whether in its original formulation of 1947-48, or in the adaptation conceptualized by Colin Powell in 1991). “*R to P*,” as it is now called colloquially at the United Nations, in the humanitarian community, and among the like-minded middle powers, focuses attention domestically, on the responsibility of governments toward their own people and toward international security against transnational threats from non-state actors (such as disease and criminal trafficking).

The concept of state failure appears to join all these trends. For the US military, “rogue states” are now expanded to include “failed states,” a label which began before 9/11 but gained currency exponentially with the actions of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and the subsequent US National Security Doctrine of 2002. For the World Bank, the focus on the state and the concept of “good governance” for economic reformers needed a category for “poor performers,” more commonly now called “fragile states” or Low-Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS). For aid donors facing pressure in the late 1990s to be more effective (by which they actually meant more selective) with their aid, they are “difficult partnerships” and also “fragile states.” Regional organizations led by NATO and the EU now intervene regularly in what they call “crisis-management,” complex humanitarian emergencies, complex peacekeeping operations, and security-sector reform. Some division of labor happens on the security front, with the US specializing in reforming or building new armies and the UK specializing in the other

aspects of security sector reform, including the police. But even the IMF and World Bank are engaged on the fiscal side of reducing military budgets.

When George W. Bush campaigned for US president in 1999, he and Condoleezza Rice criticized the Clinton Administration and his opponent, Vice President Albert Gore, Jr., for leaving the post World War II architecture in place, saying that the world had changed and the US needed a new Truman Doctrine. In fact, however, if one examines both the institutional and the class bases of the international order created in 1945-48, the results of his administration since 2000 are no change at all, indeed, it appears an intensification of it. The initial policy toward western Europe, of creating “allies from within,” has now spread to the rest of the world (most starkly in Secretary of State Rice’s policy of “transformational diplomacy”), and its European allies are sharing the policy goal as well as the resource burden. EU crisis-management mechanisms, NATO’s spread to the Balkans, then Africa and Afghanistan, the African Union peacekeeping operations, and the ABC participation in Haiti as analyzed by Monica Hirst appear to reflect a common policy and interest, the “new regionalism” of George Bush, Sr.

In sum, the concept of a “failed state” and its agenda has a long lineage and two interacting parts – economic and security, and the change of labels does not mean any change in the institutional and class bases of this US-led policy. At least one could say that these are the structural (institutional and class) constraints within which the South now operates even where individual countries retain some autonomy for domestic reform and policy. Rather than a securitization of development by the US and military authorities, one could argue that it is the economic agenda – the effect on governmental power in the economy of the neoliberal consensus, especially its declining developmental

role, capacity to provide public goods, and even growing consensus against a government's obligation to provide public goods, that is the primary cause of the crisis of the state. Peacekeeping operations are now so institutionalized behind one concept of crisis – that of state failure or collapse and the need to rebuild the state in conformity with this neoliberal economic agenda – that we will likely have more Haitian dilemmas as Monica Hirst analyzes. Regional organizations are also becoming institutionalized for this crisis-management role, following the lead of the EU and NATO, that is, a role defined by the US agenda and the burden-sharing goal of the “new regionalism.” Do they also have new possibilities for finding regional solutions to the developmental problem, as Fernando Porta asks, and which we know would be a far more effective approach to the threat of, and posed by, “state failure”? And finally, would it be possible to shift the focus away from the concept of state failure to that of responsibility, to interrogate its current use and related policy in the discourse on internationally responsible states, the responsibility to protect, and responsible stakeholders?