The Nexus Between 'Failed States' and International Terrorism

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The nexus between "failed states" and "international terrorism" is not as straightforward, as it may look at the first glance. This essay presents arguments that establish strong links, and arguments that cast doubts on the existence of a strong link between the two. It then substantiates the author's position that although state failure may create a conducive environment for the spread of international terrorism, we cannot establish a cause-and-effect relationship between failed states and international terrorism.

Since the end of the Cold War, the possible link between "failed states" and International Terrorism" has been an issue of interest to both academic scholars and policymakers. The end of the Cold War demanded a thoughtful revisit to the longstanding theories and policies; the new political order in making required new thinking. Francis Fukuyama's (1992) "The End of History and the Last Man" and Samuel Huntington's (1996) "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order" may represent the intellectual exercise of that period. In February 1994, Robert Kaplan wrote "The Coming Anarchy: How scarcity, crime, overpopulation, tribalism, and disease are rapidly destroying the social fabric of our planet". Kaplan (1998) described failed states as the most alarming signals of the coming global anarchy.

Governments ought to respond to the new environment. In May 1997 the Clinton Administration issued Presidential Directive PDD/NSC 56: "The Clinton Administration's Policy on Managing Complex Contingency Operations". The directive substantiates US' refocus on foreign policy on the ground that the Cold War has ended but new challenges have arisen. The new challenges were "rising number of territorial disputes, armed ethnic conflicts, and civil wars that pose threats to regional and international peace and may be accompanied by natural or manmade disasters which precipitate massive human suffering" (PDD/NSC 56, 1997: p.1). In Britain, Mary Kaldor (1998) has published the first editions of "New and Old Wars: Organised violence in a Global Era". Kadlor argues that the "New wars" are

concentrated in places where states and state apparatus are extremely weak or totally collapse (pp. 95-96). The New wars are characterised by "a multiplicity of types of fighting unites, both public and private, state and non-state, or some kind of mixture" (Kadlor, 2012, p.96). The September 9, 2001 terrorist attack on New York twin towers seems to vindicate the argument. Weak or failing states were seen as sources of "terrorism, regional chaos, crime, disease, and environmental catastrophe" (Mazzarr, 2014).

In the USA, the "war on terror" enjoyed bi-partisan support. Susan Rice (2003), a democrat who later served as U.S. National Security Advisor, has endorsed President Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy (US NSS, 2002) for its focus on failed states. She argued that failed and failing states are "significant threats to U.S. national security" (Rice, 2003: p.2). According to Rice (2003), failing states provide convenient operational bases and safe havens for international terrorists; they use their poorly controlled borders and territories to recruit, train and dispatch their combatants, move weapons and money. Al Qaeda was mentioned by Rice as an example, that has "hidden effectively in various African states" such as "Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Cote D'Ivoire and Mauritania" (Rice, 2003: p.2). Susan Rice's second reason was that these states "often spawn wider regional conflicts, which can substantially weaken security and retard development in their sub-regions" (Rice, 2003: p.3). The cases of Sierra Leone, Congo, and Sudan are mentions as examples where internal conflicts can grow into regional conflicts by involving other states. Francis Fukuyama (2004) claims that "[w]eak or failing states commit human right abuses, provoke humanitarian disasters, drive massive waves of immigration, and attack their neighbors" (pp. 92-93). Fukuyama argue that, since 9/11, these states "shelter international terrorists who can do significant damage to the United States and other developed countries" (Fukuyama, 2004: p.93). He further argues "[t]he failed state problem that was seen previously as largely a humanitarian or human right issue suddenly took a major security dimension" (Fukuyama, 2004: p.93).

Continuation of "Global War on Terror" policy not only in the US but also in the EU and members countries was, probably the outcome of these academic and policy discussion and factual evidence like the 9/11 and the July 7, 2005 incident in London. European Council's "A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy" (European Council, 2009) and the UK government's "Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU), Investing in Prevention: An International Strategy to Manage Risks of Instability and Improve Crisis Response" (PMSU, 2005) are policy documents that are in line with the President Bush's 2002 National

Security Strategy on failed states. Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen are frequently mentioned as examples to support these policies.

However, there are reasons to be doubtful about existence of strong causal relationship between failed states and international terrorism. Stewart Patrick (2007) argue that "little empirical analysis has been undertaken to document and explore the connection between state failure and transnational security threats" (p.1). He challenges scholars and policymakers to "have advanced blanket associations" (Patrick 2007: p.1) between failed states and international terrorism. The argument that failed states can create security challenges to the developed world have some merits. As state structure collapses and a country fails to effectively control its borders; when the state can no longer enforce law and order; and where citizens can no longer expect public goods from the government, anarchy may reign. Such a country can be susceptible to violence and, possibly, to organised crimes. However, it will be a gross generalisation to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between "violence" and "international terrorism". Not all forms of violence are terrorism; not all forms of violence create favourable situation for terrorism; and not all terrorisms are international terrorism. Making a sweeping generalisations and associate failed states with International terrorism can lead to "endorsing repression" (Dukalskis, 2015) as it happened in "Myanmar in 2007, Iran 2009-2010 Green movement" (Dukalskis, 2015: p.14) and Egypt's military coup in 2014. Practically, the boundary between non-violent and violent struggles is obscure and depends on subjective criteria. The sweeping generalisation of the Western scholars and policy makers and the obscure boundary between non-violent and violent struggles have helped authoritarian regimes to exploit "war on terror" and eliminate their opponents. This can be one reason why the Arab Spring has failed to produce what was expected from it. There are at least four reasons why making strong causal relation between failed states and international terrorism can be simplistic and possibly erroneous. These four reasons will be described briefly as diversity, measurement, propensity and violence.

Diversity: Not all failing states are alike. Just by looking at a list of top 20 failed states (Fund for Peace, 2020), one can appreciate how diverse these countries are. Each country is unique in terms of its historical legacy, the available resources, strengthens and weaknesses. Putting all these countries into a single basket called "failed states" and try to devise an overarching policy would be a sweeping judgement. Patrick (2007) warns that "obscuring their unique cultural legacies, historical experiences, and current challenges, this hodgepodge approach

risks encouraging generic, one-size-fits-all policies instead of thoughtful" (p.647) tailored interventions.

Measurement: Although the indices of "Fragile State Index" have been amended many times since their inception in 2005, they are still ambiguous on what they actually measure. Edward Newman (2007) argues that the indices are designed based on the Westphalian concept of the state. However, some countries of the world do not fulfil the Westphalian criteria, although they are members of the UN and are considered to be states by the law. The failed state debate gets lost as a result of the "discrepancy between the de jure system of state sovereignty and the de facto nature of many states" (Newman, 2007; p. 423). Weak states define their statehood by their reliance on negative sovereignty – by their capacity to fight against external interference; whereas strong Westphalia states rely on positive sovereignty – by their ability to govern through provision of public goods and services (Jackson, 1991).

Propensity: There is large disparity among the failed states on their propensity to terrorism. Weaknesses of the state apparatus alone cannot explain "why terrorist activity is concentrated in particular regions" (Patrick, 2006 p. 35). In addition to the strength or weakness of the state, variables such as religion, geography, historical legacy and regime type should be taken into consideration. Terrorism requires persuasion. If the ideology of an international terrorist organisation is not compatible with the mentality and/culture of the people, it is unlikely that the country can be a "safe haven" for the organisation only because it lacks effective government.

Violence. It is possible that the fragility of a state may lead to violence. But, not all violent means of struggle to change a regime are terrorism. Authoritarian regimes of weak states are exploiting the war on terror. They can easily manipulate peaceful resistances and make them (or make them seem) violent. As Errol Henderson (2008) noted "[s]uch an orientation placed at the service of an ill-defined 'global war on terror' provides a potentially universal justification for preventive war, ironically, with a pretext ostensibly rooted in democratic principles, which, nevertheless, is likely to brook little dissent given, among other things, its perceived universal applicability and the dire consequences that 'war' or 'terrorism' portends" (p.54). The failure of Arab Spring should be analysed from this perspective as well.

Based on the discussion above, the author argues that *although state failure may create a conducive environment for the spread of international terrorism, we cannot establish a cause-and-effect relationship between failed states and international terrorism.*

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