

Weak States and Global Threats: Fact or Fiction?

It has become a common claim that the gravest dangers to U.S. and world security are no longer military threats from rival great powers, but rather transnational threats emanating from the world's most poorly governed countries. Poorly performing developing countries are linked to humanitarian catastrophes; mass migration; environmental degradation; regional instability; energy insecurity; global pandemics; international crime; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); and, of course, transnational terrorism. Leading thinkers such as Francis Fukuyama have said that, “[s]ince the end of the Cold War, weak and failing states have arguably become the single-most important problem for international order.”¹ Official Washington agrees. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declares that nations incapable of exercising “responsible sovereignty” have a “spillover effect” in the form of terrorism, weapons proliferation, and other dangers.² This new focus on weak and failing states represents an important shift in U.S. threat perceptions. Before the September 11 attacks, U.S. policymakers viewed states with sovereignty deficits exclusively through a humanitarian lens; they piqued the moral conscience but possessed little strategic significance. Al Qaeda’s ability to act with impunity from Afghanistan changed this calculus, convincing President George W. Bush and his administration that “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.”³

This new strategic orientation has already had policy and institutional consequences, informing recent U.S. defense, intelligence, diplomatic, development, and even trade initiatives. The U.S. government’s latest *National Defense Strategy* calls on the U.S. military to strengthen the sovereign

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The Washington Quarterly • 29:2 pp. 27–53.

capacities of weak states to combat internal threats of terrorism, insurgency, and organized crime. Beyond expanding its training of foreign security forces, the Pentagon is seeking interagency buy-in for a U.S. strategy to address the world's "ungoverned spaces."⁴ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which has identified 50 such zones globally, is devoting new collection assets to long-neglected parts of the world.⁵ The National Intelligence

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Council is assisting the Department of State's new Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization in identifying states at risk of collapse so that the office can launch conflict prevention and mitigation efforts. Not to be outdone, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has formulated its own "Fragile States Strategy" to bolster countries that could breed terror, crime, instability, and disease. The Bush administration has even justified the Central American

Free Trade Area as a means to prevent state failure and its associated spillovers.⁶

This new preoccupation with weak states is not limited to the United States. In the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit has advocated a government-wide approach to stabilizing fragile countries,⁷ and Canada and Australia are following suit. The United Nations has been similarly engaged; the unifying theme of last year's proposals for UN reform was the need for effective sovereign states to deal with today's global security agenda. Kofi Annan remarked before the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in 2004 that, "[w]hether the threat is terror or AIDS, a threat to one is a threat to all.... Our defenses are only as strong as their weakest link."⁸ In September 2005, the UN endorsed the creation of a new Peacebuilding Commission to help war-torn states recover. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in January 2005 also launched a "Fragile States" initiative in partnership with the World Bank's Low-Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS) program.⁹

It is striking, however, how little empirical evidence underpins these sweeping assertions and policy developments. Policymakers and experts have presumed a blanket connection between weak governance and transnational threats and have begun to implement policy responses accordingly. Yet, they have rarely distinguished among categories of weak and failing states or asked whether (and how) certain types of developing countries are associated with particular threats. Too often, it appears that the entire range of

Western policies is animated by anecdotal evidence or isolated examples, such as Al Qaeda's operations in Afghanistan or cocaine trafficking in Colombia. The risk in this approach is that the United States will squander energy and resources in a diffuse, unfocused effort to attack state weakness wherever it arises, without appropriate attention to setting priorities and tailoring responses to poor governance and its specific, attendant spillovers.

Before embracing a new strategic vision and investing in new initiatives, conventional wisdom should be replaced by sober, detailed analysis. The ultimate goal of this fine-grained approach should be to determine which states are associated with which dangers. Weak states do often incubate global threats, but this correlation is far from universal. Crafting a more effective U.S. strategy will depend on a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms linking poor governance and state incapacity in the developing world with cross-border spillovers.

Defining Weak and Failing States

There is no consensus on the precise number of weak and failing states. The Commission on Weak States and U.S. National Security estimates that there are between 50 and 60; the United Kingdom's Department for International Development classifies 46 nations with 870 million inhabitants as "fragile"; and the World Bank treats 30 countries as LICUS.¹⁰ These divergent estimates reflect differences in the criteria used to define state weakness, the indicators used to gauge it, and the relative weighting of various aspects of governance.

State strength is relative and can be measured by the state's ability and willingness to provide the fundamental political goods associated with statehood: physical security, legitimate political institutions, economic management, and social welfare. Many countries have critical gaps in one or more of these four areas of governance. In effect, they possess legal but not actual sovereignty. In the security realm, they struggle to maintain a monopoly on the use of force, control borders and territory, ensure public order, and provide safety from crime. In the political sphere, they lack legitimate governing institutions that provide effective administration, ensure checks on power, protect basic rights and freedoms, hold leaders accountable, deliver impartial justice, and permit broad citizen participation. In the economic arena, they strain to carry out basic macroeconomic and fiscal policies or establish a legal and regulatory climate conducive to entrepreneurship, private enterprise, open trade, natural resource management, foreign investment, and economic growth. Finally, in the social domain, they fail to meet the basic needs of their populations by making even minimal investments in health, education, and other social services.

Yet, not all weak states look alike. They range in a spectrum from collapsed states, such as Somalia, that have gaps in all four capacities to fragile “good performers,” such as Senegal, that are making some progress in most or all areas. In between, most weak states struggle on many fronts or muddle through. Not by coincidence, weak and failing states tend to be ineligible for

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the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), an innovative aid window announced by Bush in March 2002 to reward countries that have a demonstrated commitment to “ruling justly,” “investing in their people,” and “promoting economic freedom.”¹¹

State weakness is not just a question of capacity but also of will. History provides repeated examples of corrupt, incompetent, or venal regimes—Zimbabwe today under President Robert Mugabe, for example—that have

driven promising countries into the ground.¹² By distinguishing between capacity and will, four categories of weak states can be differentiated: relatively good performers, states that are weak but willing, states that have the means but not the will, and those with neither the will nor the way to fulfill the basic functions of statehood (see table 1). Such analytical distinctions have policy utility, informing the mix of incentives external actors might deploy in engaging poor performers. The goal is to move weak states toward the upper left quadrant of table 1 by filling capacity gaps, persuading unconstructed states to mend their ways, or both.

Compared to other developing countries, weak and failing states are more likely to suffer from low or no growth and to be furthest away from reaching the Millennium Development Goals, a set of commitments made by UN member states in 2000 to make concrete progress by 2015 in critical development objectives, such as eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achiev-

Table 1: Capacity and Will as Dimensions of State Weakness

	Strong Will	Low Will
High Capacity	Relatively Good Performers (e.g., Senegal, Honduras)	Unresponsive/Corrupt/Repressive (e.g., Burma, Zimbabwe)
Low Capacity	Weak but Willing (e.g., Mozambique, East Timor)	Weak and Not Willing (e.g., Haiti, Sudan)

ing universal primary education, and reducing child mortality. The inhabitants of these weak and failing states are likely to be poor and malnourished, live with chronic illness and die young, go without education and basic health care, suffer gender discrimination, and lack access to modern technology. Compared to OECD, or developed, countries, fragile states are 15 times more prone to civil war, with such violence both more extreme and longer lasting than even in other developing countries. Such states are the overwhelming source of the world's refugees and internally displaced peoples. Many are also among the world's worst abusers of human rights.¹³

The most comprehensive and well-respected system for evaluating state performance is the World Bank's "Governance Matters" data set. The most recent installment, in 2005, ranks 209 countries and territories along six dimensions: voice and accountability, political instability and violence, government effectiveness, regulatory burden, rule of law, and control of corruption.¹⁴ Table 2 lists the 44 countries that rest in the bottom quintile, ranked from weakest (Somalia) to strongest (Algeria).

Three observations can be drawn from this data. First, the weakest states are not necessarily the poorest. Accordingly, the fifth quintile includes several lower-middle-income countries, such as Venezuela, and excludes a few very poor countries, such as Gambia and Niger. This definition of state weakness differs from that adopted by the World Bank and OECD/DAC donors, which restrict the category "fragile state" to very poor countries that

Table 2: Bottom Quintile of Aggregate Governance Rankings

Somalia (weakest)	Cote d'Ivoire	Venezuela
Iraq	Nigeria	Guinea
Myanmar	Laos	Togo
Democratic Republic of Congo	Angola	Azerbaijan
Afghanistan	Equatorial Guinea	Bangladesh
Liberia	Tajikistan	Cuba
Haiti	Republic of Congo	Iran
Zimbabwe	Belarus	Nepal
Turkmenistan	Chad	Libya
Sudan	Yemen	Syria
North Korea	Solomon Islands	Sierra Leone
Uzbekistan	West Bank/Gaza	Guinea-Bissau
Burundi	Pakistan	Cameroon
Central African Republic	Ethiopia	Comoros
	Eritrea	Algeria (strongest)

Source: Kaufmann, Kray, and Mastruzzi, *Governance Matters IV*, 2005.

are eligible for the bank's concessional (International Development Association) window and that score lowest on the bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment indicators. That approach, although consistent with the poverty reduction mandate of aid agencies, is overly restrictive for policy analysts and officials interested in the security implications of weak governance across the entire range of developing countries.

State weakness is not just a question of capacity but also of will.

Second, the list of weak and failing states in table 2 captures a diverse collection of countries that pose a similarly diverse array of potential challenges to U.S. foreign and national security policy. Most of these countries are either in conflict or recovering from it, have experienced recurrent bouts of political instability, or rank very low in terms of "human security," as measured by risk of violent death and abuses to core human rights.¹⁵ Several are "outposts of tyranny," in the

Bush administration's parlance (e.g., North Korea, Belarus, Cuba, Zimbabwe), authoritarian states that may appear superficially strong but rest on a brittle foundation. Others are sites of ongoing U.S. combat and reconstruction efforts (Iraq, Afghanistan); active or potential WMD proliferators (North Korea, Iran, Pakistan); past or present safe havens for terrorism (Afghanistan, Yemen); anchors of regional stability or instability (Nigeria, Pakistan); bases for narcotics trafficking and crime (Burma); potential sources of uncontrolled migration (Haiti); critical energy suppliers (Venezuela, Nigeria); locations of epidemic disease (Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC]); or settings for recent atrocities and humanitarian crises (Sudan, Liberia, Burundi, Sierra Leone). Needless to say, a single state frequently falls into more than one of these categories of concern.

Third, the relationship between state weakness and spillovers is not linear. It varies by threat. Some salient transnational dangers to U.S. and global security come not from states at the bottom quintile of the Governance Matters rankings but from the next tier up, countries such as Colombia, the world's leading producer of cocaine; Saudi Arabia, home to a majority of the September 11 hijackers; Russia, a host of numerous transnational criminal enterprises; and China, the main source both of SARS and avian flu. These states tend to be better run and more capable of delivering political goods; nearly half are eligible or on the threshold of eligibility for the MCA in 2006. Nevertheless, even these middling performers may suffer from critical gaps in capacity or political will that enable spillovers.

How do these sets of states correlate with significant transnational threats to the United States and the international community? The answer depends in part on which threat you are talking about.

Transnational Threats and U.S. National Security

The growing concern with weak and failing states is really based on two separate propositions: first, that traditional concepts of security such as interstate violence should expand to encompass cross-border threats driven by nonstate actors (such as terrorism), activities (crime), or forces (pandemics); and second, that such threats have their origins in large measure in weak governance in the developing world.

Since the Reagan administration, successive versions of the *National Security Strategy* have incorporated nonmilitary concerns such as terrorism, organized crime, infectious disease, energy security, and environmental degradation. The common thread linking these challenges is that they originate primarily in sovereign jurisdictions abroad but have the potential to harm U.S. citizens. Some national security traditionalists resist this definitional expansion on the grounds that such concerns pose at best an indirect rather than existential threat to U.S. national interests or even human life. Proponents of a wider view respond that unconventional threats may contribute to violence by destabilizing states and regions. More fundamentally, they argue that the traditional “violence paradigm” for national security must adapt to accommodate other threats to the safety, well-being, and way of life of U.S. citizens. Such threats include not only malevolent, purposive ones such as transnational terrorism, something many traditionalists now accept, but also “threats without a threatener”—malignant forces that emerge from nature, such as global pandemics, or as by-products of human activity, such as climate change.¹⁶

Traditionalists may similarly be dubious that weak and failing states in general endanger U.S. national security.¹⁷ More relevant, they contend, are a handful of pivotal weak states, such as nuclear-armed Pakistan or North Korea, whose fortunes may affect regional balances of power or prospects for large-scale destruction.¹⁸ Yet, it is not always easy to predict where threats may emerge. In the 1990s, few anticipated that remote, poor, and war-ravaged Afghanistan would be the launching pad for the most devastating attack on the United States in the nation’s history.

The challenge for policy analysts is to discern more carefully which states are likely to present which baskets of transnational problems. Such distinctions will allow them to direct limited resources to address the priority challenges in critical countries and tailor responses to the key incentive structures in those countries accordingly. A start here is to look more closely at the potential links of weak and failing states to terrorism, WMD proliferation, crime, disease, energy insecurity, and regional instability.

HOTBEDS OF TERRORISM?

Both the Bush administration and outside commentators frequently contend that countries with weak or nonexistent governance are greater risks to generate and serve as hosts of transnational terrorist organizations. As the *New York Times* argued in July 2005, “Failed states that cannot provide jobs and food for their people, that have lost chunks of territory to warlords, and that can no longer track or control their borders, send an invitation to terrorists.”¹⁹

Such claims have some justification. Data on global terrorist attacks from the University of Maryland show that, from 1991 to 2001, most individual terrorists came from low-income authoritarian countries in conflict, such as Sudan, Algeria, and Afghanistan.²⁰ Similarly, data compiled annually by the State Department reveals that for 2003–2005 most U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations use weak and failing states as their primary bases of operations.²¹ Weak and failing states appeal to transnational terrorist organizations for the multiple benefits they offer: safe havens, conflict experience, settings for training and indoctrination, access to weapons and equipment, financial resources, staging grounds and transit zones, targets for operations, and pools of recruits. Al Qaeda, for example, enjoyed the hospitality of Sudan and Afghanistan, where it built training camps and enlisted new members; exploited Kenya and Yemen to launch attacks on U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam as well as on the USS *Cole*; and financed its operations through illicit trade in gemstones, including diamonds and tanzanite, from African conflict zones.²²

Accordingly, the United States is seeking to deny terrorists access to weak states. Africa has emerged as a primary arena of concern. An analysis of the 9/11 Commission report by the Congressional Research Service warns that that “the international terror threat against the [United States] and local interests is likely to continue to grow in several parts of Africa because of porous borders, lax security, political instability, and a lack of state resources and capacities.”²³ The Department of Defense is responding by training African security forces in a dozen countries in the Sahel to control their borders and territories more effectively.²⁴ More comprehensively, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* commits the United States to “diminishing the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit”²⁵ by bolstering state capacities, alleviating poverty, and promoting good governance. Bush echoed this theme in his September 2005 speech at the UN High-Level Plenary Meeting, declaring, “We must help raise up the failing states and stagnant societies that provide fertile ground for terrorists.”²⁶

A closer look suggests that the connection between state weakness and transnational terrorism is more complicated and tenuous than often as-

sumed. First, obviously not all weak and failed states are afflicted by terrorism. As historian Walter Laqueur points out, “In the 49 countries currently designated by the United Nations as the least developed hardly any terrorist activity occurs.”²⁷ Weak capacity per se cannot explain why terrorist activity is concentrated in particular regions, particularly the Middle East and broader Muslim world, rather than others such as Central Africa. Other variables and dynamics, including political, religious, cultural, and geographical factors, clearly shape its global distribution.

Similarly, not all terrorism that occurs in weak and failing states is transnational. Much is self-contained action by insurgents motivated by local political grievances, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), or national liberation struggles, such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. It is thus only tangentially related to the “global war on terrorism,” which, as defined by the Bush administration, focuses on terrorists with global reach, particularly those motivated by an extreme Salafist strand of Wahhabi Islam.

Third, not all weak and failing states are equal. Conventional wisdom holds that terrorists are particularly attracted to collapsed, lawless polities such as Somalia or Liberia, or what the Pentagon terms “ungoverned spaces.” In fact, as Davidson College professor Ken Menkhaus and others note, terrorists are more likely to find weak but functioning states, such as Pakistan or Kenya, congenial bases of operations. Such badly governed states are not only fragile and susceptible to corruption, but they also provide easy access to the financial and logistical infrastructure of the global economy, including communications technology, transportation, and banking services.²⁸

Fourth, transnational terrorists are only partially and perhaps decreasingly reliant on weak and failing states. For one, the Al Qaeda threat has evolved from a centrally directed network, dependent on a “base,” into a much more diffuse global movement consisting of autonomous cells in dozens of countries, poor and wealthy alike. Moreover, the source of radical Islamic terrorism may reside less in state weakness in the Middle East than in the alienation of de-territorialized Muslims in Europe. The “safe havens” of global terrorists are as likely to be the *banlieues* of Paris as the wastes of the Sahara or the slums of Karachi.²⁹

In other words, weak and failing states can provide useful assets to transnational terrorists, but they may be less central to their operations than widely believed. If there is one failed state today that is important to transnational terrorism, it is probably Iraq. As CIA director Porter Goss tes-

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tified in early 2005, the U.S.-led invasion and occupation transformed a brutal but secular authoritarian state into a symbol and magnet for the global jihadi movement.³⁰

Although all four governance gaps associated with weak and failing states may contribute to transnational terrorism, political and security gaps are the most important. In the absence of peaceful outlets for political expression, frustrated groups are more likely to adopt violence against repressive regimes and their perceived foreign sponsors. Similarly, states that do not control borders or territory facilitate terrorist infiltration and operations. Two other gaps may play supporting roles. When states do not meet basic social needs, they provide openings for charitable organizations or educational systems linked to radical networks. Similarly, states lacking effective economic institutions are more likely to suffer from stagnant growth, breed political extremism, and be unable to regulate terrorist financing.

In seeking to bolster weak states against transnational terrorism, policymakers must distinguish between capacity and will. The U.S. Anti-Terrorist Assistance program is predicated on the belief that well-intentioned but poor governments, in the Sahel or East Africa, for example, simply lack the tools to do the job. Yet, the cases of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia suggest a more serious impediment: a lack of determination by governing regimes, worried about alienating an already radicalized population, to take forceful steps such as cracking down on jihadi groups or imposing central authority over restive regions.³¹

WEAPONS PROLIFERATION RISKS?

Fears that weak and failing states may incubate transnational terrorism merge with a related concern: that poorly governed countries may be unable or disinclined to control stocks of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons or prevent the onward spread or leakage of WMD-related technology. This is not an idle worry. According to the British government, of the 17 states that have current or suspended WMD programs beyond the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, 13 are “countries at risk of instability.”³² The most frightening prospect is that a nuclear-armed state such as Pakistan or North Korea might lose control of its nuclear weapons through collapse or theft, placing the weapons into the hands of a successor regime or nonstate actors with little compunction about their use. A more likely scenario might involve the transfer of biological weapons, which are easier to make and transport but difficult to track.

Direct transfer of functioning WMD should not be the only concern. Revelations about the extensive international nuclear arms bazaar of Abdul Qadeer Khan suggest that poor governance may be the Achilles’ heel of glo-

bal nonproliferation efforts. For more than two decades, Khan, Pakistan's leading nuclear scientist, orchestrated a clandestine operation to sell sensitive expertise and technology, including the means to produce fissile material and to design and fabricate nuclear weapons, to Iran, Libya, and North Korea. As David Albright and Corey Hinderson stated, "The Khan network could not have evolved into such a dangerous supplier without the utter corruption and dishonesty of successive Pakistani governments, which, for almost two decades, were quick to deny any involvement of its scientists in illicit procurement."³³ Furthermore, it could not have gone global without institutional weaknesses in more advanced middle-income countries, including Malaysia, South Africa, and Turkey, that possessed manufacturing capabilities but lacked the knowledge, capacity, or will to implement relevant export control and non-proliferation laws.

Weak and failing states may be less central to terrorist operations than widely believed.

Although U.S. officials are understandably preoccupied with the dangers of WMD proliferation, for most of the world the spread of more mundane but still deadly conventional weapons poses the greatest threat to human security and civil peace. There is clear evidence that weak, failing, and postconflict states play a critical role in the global proliferation of small arms and light weapons. According to the Geneva-based *Small Arms Survey*, more than 640 million such weapons circulate globally, many among private hands and for illicit purposes.³⁴ Weak states are often the source, transit, and destination countries for the illegal arms trade. On the borderlands of the former Soviet Union, for example, vast stockpiles of weapons remain in ill-secured depots, providing tempting targets for rebel groups, terrorists, and international criminal organizations. Such matériel frequently surfaces on the global black or grey markets, as corrupt officials manipulate legitimate export licenses to obscure the military purpose or ultimate recipient of the shipment. In one notable instance in 1999, Ukraine's export agency transferred 68 tons of munitions to Burkina Faso. The weapons were then shipped to Liberia and ultimately to Sierra Leone, landing in the hands of Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front.³⁵

The availability of conventional weapons further weakens state capacity by fueling civil wars and insurgencies, fostering a culture of criminality and impunity. As the experiences of Afghanistan, Haiti, and the DRC, among others, show, easy access to instruments of violence complicates efforts by governments and international partners to establish public order and the rule of law, provide relief, and pursue more ambitious development goals.

The risk of proliferation from weak states is often more a matter of will than capacity.

As with terrorism, the risk of proliferation from weak states is often more a matter of will than of objective capacity. This is particularly true for WMD proliferation. The technological sophistication and secure facilities needed to construct such weapons would seem to require access to and some acquiescence from the highest levels of the state apparatus. This may be less true for small arms proliferation. Some weak states simply lack the capacity to police the grey or black market and to control flows of such weapons across their borders.

Of the four governance gaps, WMD proliferation is most likely to be correlated with security and political shortcomings, particularly poor civilian oversight of the defense establishment and the presence of an authoritarian and corrupt regime. In the case of small arms, weak economic institutions may also create incentives and opportunities for proliferation.

Beyond posing terrorist or proliferation risks, weak and failing states are said to provide ideal bases for transnational criminal enterprises involved in the production, transit, or trafficking of drugs, weapons, people, and other illicit commodities and in the laundering of the profits from such activities. The surging scope and scale of global organized crime underpins these concerns. The worldwide narcotics trade alone is now estimated to be a \$300–500 billion business, on a par with at least the global automobile industry or at most the global oil industry. Former International Monetary Fund managing director Michel Camdessus estimates that money laundering accounts for 2–5 percent of world gross domestic product, or between \$800 billion and \$2 trillion.³⁶

The rise in organized crime is being driven by the dynamics of globalization. Recent advances in communications and transportation, the removal of commercial barriers, and the deregulation of financial services have created unprecedented opportunities for illicit activity, from money laundering to trafficking in drugs, arms, and people. National authorities, particularly in weak states, strain to encourage legitimate commerce while curbing illicit trade.³⁷

DENS OF THIEVES?

The relationship between transnational organized crime and weak states is parasitic. All things being equal, criminal networks are drawn to environments where the rule of law is absent or imperfectly applied, law enforcement and border controls are lax, regulatory systems are weak, contracts go

unenforced, public services are unreliable, corruption is rife, and the state itself may be subject to capture. As University of Pittsburgh professor Phil Williams said, such capacity gaps provide “functional holes” that criminal enterprises can exploit. Poor governance has made Africa, in the words of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, “an ideal conduit through which to extract and/or transship a range of illicit commodities, such as drugs, firearms, minerals and oil, timber, wildlife, and human beings.”³⁸ Transnational organized crime further reduces weak-state capacity, as criminals manipulate corruption to gain protection for themselves and their activities and to open new avenues for profit. Criminal groups have become adept at exploiting weak-state capacity in conflict zones, such as Colombia or the DRC, where political authority is contested or formal institutions have collapsed, and in fluid postconflict settings, such as Bosnia or Kosovo, where they have not yet been firmly reestablished.

Yet, if state weakness is often a necessary condition for the influx of organized crime, it is not a sufficient one. Even more than a low-risk operating environment, criminals seek profits. In a global economy, realizing high returns depends on tapping into a worldwide market to sell illicit commodities and launder the proceeds, which in turn depends on access to financial services, modern telecommunications, and transportation infrastructure. Such considerations help explain why South Africa and Nigeria have become magnets for transnational and domestic organized crime and why Togo has not.³⁹ Criminals will accept the higher risks of operating in states with stronger capacity in return for greater rewards.

In addition, the link between global crime and state weakness varies by sector. The category “transnational crime” encompasses a vast array of activities, not limited to narcotics trafficking, alien smuggling, piracy, environmental crime, sanctions violations, contraband smuggling, counterfeiting, financial fraud, high-technology crime, and money laundering. Some of these activities, such as narcotics trafficking, are closely linked to state weakness. Poorly governed states dominate the annual list of countries Washington designates as “major” drug-producing and -transiting nations. Nearly 90 percent of global heroin, for example, comes from Afghanistan and is trafficked to Europe via poorly governed states in Central Asia or along the “Balkan route.” Burma is the second-largest producer of opium and a key source of methamphetamine. Weak states similarly dominate the list of countries designated as the worst offenders in human trafficking, a \$7–8 billion business that sends an estimated 800,000 women and children across borders annually for purposes of forced labor or sexual slavery.⁴⁰

Other criminal sectors such as money laundering, financial fraud, cyber crime, intellectual property theft, and environmental crime are less obvi-

ously correlated with state weakness. With few exceptions, for example, money laundering occurs primarily in small offshore financial centers, wealthy nations, or middle-income countries. The reason is straightforward: most weak and failing states lack the requisite banking systems. On the other hand, many of the profits being laundered come from activities that emanate from or transit through weak states.

Among the four governance gaps, the rise of transnational organized crime in weak states appears to be most closely correlated with poor economic and political institutions. Poor regulatory environments and unaccountable political systems constrain the growth of the licit economy and create opportunities for corruption, both grand and petty. Inadequate public security and social welfare may play a secondary role by fostering a culture of lawlessness and permitting criminals to win support by meeting basic needs of a beleaguered population. Finally, the relative role of capacity versus will in facilitating transnational organized crime in weak states tends to vary. As crime becomes more entrenched, a compromised political elite is less likely to deploy the capacities at its disposal to fight it.

PLAGUE AND PESTILENCE?

The threat of the rapid spread of avian influenza, which could conceivably kill tens of millions of people, has placed infectious disease into the first tier of national security issues. There is growing concern that weak and failing states may serve as important breeding grounds for new pandemics and, lacking adequate capacity to respond to these diseases, endanger global health. As development economists Clive Bell and Maureen Lewis said, “Failed or faltering states cannot or will not perform basic public health functions ... placing the rest of the world at risk.”⁴¹

Since 1973, more than 30 previously unknown disease agents, including HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and the West Nile virus, have emerged for which no cures are available. Most have originated in developing countries. During the same time span, more than 20 well-known pathogens, including tuberculosis, malaria, and cholera, have reemerged or spread, often in more virulent and drug-resistant forms.⁴² In an age of mass travel and global commerce, when more than 2 million people cross international borders a day and air freight exceeds 100 billion ton-kilometers a year, inadequate capacity or insufficient will to respond with vigorous public health measures can quickly threaten lives across the globe. National security and public health experts worry that weak and failed states, which invest little in epidemiological surveillance, health information and reporting systems, primary health care delivery, preventive measures, or response capacity, will lack the means to detect and contain outbreaks of deadly disease.

These worries are well founded. Although there is little solid data on the link between state capacity and epidemic patterns, it is known that the global infectious disease burden falls overwhelmingly (90 percent) on low- and middle-income countries that account for only 11 percent of global health spending. The Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center has devised a typology of countries by health care status, ranking nations into five categories on the basis of resources and priority devoted to public health, quality of health care, access to drugs, and capacity for surveillance and response. States in the bottom two quintiles are the main victims of the world's seven deadliest infectious diseases: respiratory infections, HIV/AIDS, diarrheal diseases, tuberculosis, malaria, hepatitis B, and measles. Sub-Saharan Africa is the hardest hit, with just 10 percent of the world's population but 90 percent of its malaria and 75 percent of its HIV/AIDS cases.⁴³

For epidemics, the weak-state problem tends to be one of capacity more than will.

The spread of infectious disease is being driven partly by breakdowns in public health, especially during periods of political turmoil and war. HIV/AIDS is a case in point. Nearly all instances of the disease in South and Southeast Asia can be traced to strains that evolved in northern Burma, an ungoverned warren of drug gangs, irregular militias, and human traffickers. Similarly, the collapse of the DRC made it a petri dish for the evolution of numerous strains of HIV. Nor does peace always improve matters, at least initially. In Ethiopia and several other African countries, rising HIV/AIDS prevalence has paralleled the return and demobilization of ex-combatants and their reintegration into society, exposing the wider citizenry to disease contracted during military deployments.⁴⁴

Beyond countries in conflict, many developing and transitional states possess decrepit and decaying public health systems that can easily be overwhelmed. Following the end of the Cold War, the states of the former Soviet Union all experienced spikes in the incidence of measles, tuberculosis, and HIV. In the spring of 2005, weak health infrastructure in Angola amplified an outbreak of the hemorrhagic fever Marburg. The same year, the government of Nigeria failed to enforce a national immunization program, allowing polio, a disease on the brink of eradication, to spread across a broad swath of Africa and beyond to Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia.

Diseases incubated in weak and failing states pose both direct and indirect threats to the United States. Significant numbers of U.S. citizens may become infected and die. Even if they do not, such epidemics may impose

high economic costs and undermine key countries or regions. The World Bank estimates that SARS cost the East Asian regional economy some \$20–25 billion, despite killing only 912 people.⁴⁵ The political costs of disease are more nuanced but no less real. In the most heavily affected African countries, HIV/AIDS has decimated human capital and fiscal systems, undermining the already limited capacity of states to deliver basic services, control territory, and manage the economy. It has strained health and education systems, eroded social cohesion, undermined agriculture and economic growth, and weakened armies. The pandemic is spreading rapidly into Eurasia and could surge to 110 million cases by 2010, with dramatic increases in countries of strategic significance such as India, China, and Russia.⁴⁶

In the growing transnational threat posed by epidemics, the weak-state problem tends to be one of capacity more than will. Although there have been prominent cases of official denial and foot-dragging (e.g., over HIV/AIDS in Russia or SARS in China), the greater problem is a genuine inability to prevent and respond adequately to disease outbreaks. The most salient governance gap in the case of epidemics is in providing social welfare, notably underdeveloped public health infrastructure.

ENERGY INSECURITY?

The doubling of world oil prices in 2005 exposed strains and volatility in the global energy market at a time of surging global demand, intensifying competition over dwindling reserves, and instability in key producer countries from Iraq to Nigeria to Venezuela. To some, these trends suggest that reliance on oil and gas from weak and failing states may endanger U.S. and global energy security by increasing the volatility, costs, and risk of interruption of supplies. Beyond requiring the United States to pay an “insecurity premium,” such dependence may complicate the pursuit of broader U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives.

Anxiety about U.S. energy security is nothing new. Much hand-wringing accompanied the oil crisis of the mid-1970s, when domestic U.S. production peaked and the country confronted an Arab oil embargo. Despite temporary shortages and an oil price shock, the Nixon-era United States managed to find alternate sources of supply. Most economists are confident that today’s markets are similarly capable of absorbing temporary interruptions, albeit at a price.

Nevertheless, some new dynamics deserve consideration. First, the U.S. quest for energy security is occurring at a time of increased global competition for limited supplies. Since 2000, the world’s consumption of fossil fuels has risen much faster than most analysts had predicted, driven not only by sustained U.S. demand but also by China’s seemingly unquenchable thirst for energy. During 2004 alone, Chinese oil imports surged by 40 percent,

making China the world's second-largest oil importing country.⁴⁷ The removal of excess production and refining capacity has resulted in a dramatic tightening of the global energy market and has left prices vulnerable to sudden spikes in the event of disturbances in producer countries.

Second, price shocks are increasingly likely, given the world's growing reliance on energy supplies from weak states, as proven reserves in stable countries peak or become depleted. As Hampshire College professor of security studies Michael Klare said, the geographic concentration of exploitable fossil fuels means that the availability of energy is "closely tied to political and socioeconomic conditions within a relatively small group of countries."⁴⁸ Significantly, many of the world's main oil exporters, including Iraq, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, are less stable today than in 2000. The United Kingdom calculates that some 60 percent of global oil reserves are located in countries "facing stability challenges," such as Azerbaijan, where untapped reserves could generate \$124 billion in revenue by 2024. Complicating matters, a large percentage of the world's oil and gas transits unstable regions, such as Transcaucasia, and vulnerable choke points, such as the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca, via pipeline or tanker.⁴⁹

The U.S. exposure to volatility and interruption of energy supplies has grown markedly since 1973, when it imported only 34 percent of its crude oil. By 2005 this figure was 58 percent, with fully one-third coming from Venezuela, Nigeria, Iraq, and Angola. Increasingly, U.S. energy security is hostage to foreign political developments.⁵⁰ During the past several years, oil markets have tightened in response to strikes in Venezuela, violence in Nigeria, and insurgency in Iraq. This dependence on weak states will only increase. By 2015 the United States is forecast to be importing 68 percent of its oil, a quarter of it from the Gulf of Guinea, up from today's 15 percent. All of the countries in that region—Angola, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Nigeria—face tremendous governance challenges.⁵¹ Nigeria, a fragile democracy that Washington hopes will become an anchor of stability in the region, is beset by rampant corruption and crime, simmering ethnic tensions, and grinding poverty. During the past three years, rebels in the Niger Delta have repeatedly disrupted Nigeria's oil flow.

Rising dependence on energy from weak and failing states promises to have unpleasant ramifications for wider U.S. foreign policy objectives. It will surely complicate U.S. democracy promotion by encouraging Washington to

Energy insecurity tends to be correlated with political and economic governance gaps.

cozy up to authoritarian dictators or to intervene to shore up unstable regimes in regions such as the Caucasus or Central Asia. Even where the United States sticks to its principles, it may find good governance elusive in countries awash in petrodollars. For such “trust fund states,” as Fareed Zakaria terms them, it is all too easy to rely on easy natural resource revenue rather than to do the hard work of building the economic and political institutions necessary to create enduring wealth and foster human liberty.⁵²

By definition, the transnational threat of energy insecurity is peculiar to a subset of weak states that either possess large energy resources or sit astride transit routes. The nature of this threat varies according to whether state weakness is a function of insufficient will, inadequate capacity, or both. For Venezuela or Iran, for example, the main risk of interrupted supplies comes from the unpredictability of autocratic regimes. For Nigeria or post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, in contrast, the risk is that weak elected governments will be unable to ensure oil flows in the face of domestic instability. In either case, the governance gaps most closely correlated with energy insecurity tend to be political and economic, reflecting the tendency of natural resource riches to produce endemic corruption, abusive state power, and long-term stagnation.

BAD NEIGHBORS?

Experience since the end of the Cold War has shown that conflict in developing countries can have critical transnational dimensions.⁵³ A common contention is that violent conflict and complex emergencies often spill over the porous borders of weak and failing states, destabilizing regions. Such claims have merit. As state structures collapse and borders become more porous, these countries often export violence as well as refugees, political instability, and economic dislocation to states in their vicinity. This risk is compounded when weak, vulnerable, or collapsed states are adjacent to countries with similar characteristics that possess few defenses against spillovers. Weaknesses in one state can thus encourage the rise of an entire bad neighborhood. Such a pattern emerged in West Africa during the 1990s, as the conflict in Liberia under Charles Taylor poured across national borders in the form of people, guns, and conflict diamonds, undermining neighboring Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d’Ivoire.⁵⁴

In reciprocal fashion, bad neighborhoods can undermine governance and encourage violence in already weak states. Many recent internal conflicts, from that of Burundi in the Great Lakes Region of Africa to that of Tajikistan in Central Asia, have been embedded in such regional conflict formations. In some cases, contiguous countries have fomented civil war by supporting armed groups across borders that share their political goals. In other cases, transnational networks, whether based on ethnic identity, political affinity,

or economic interest, have undermined the central government and fueled violent conflict by facilitating illicit traffic in small arms, drugs, people, or lootable commodities. Where regional conflict formations are present, sustainable peace may depend on successful peace-building in the larger region.⁵⁵

Given their propensity to descend into violence and embroil neighboring countries, weak and failing states are disproportionately at risk of external military intervention. State failure preceded virtually every case of the 30-odd instances of U.S. military intervention between 1960 and 2005.⁵⁶ Failed and failing states have also been the overwhelming focus of the 55 UN peacekeeping operations over the same period.⁵⁷

Even in the absence of violence, failing states impose significant economic hardship on their regions, undoing years of development efforts. Recent analysis by the World Bank suggests that the average total cost of a failed state to itself and its neighbors amounts to a staggering \$82.4 billion, or more than the total global foreign aid budget of \$79 billion. In other words, the collapse of a single state can effectively erase an entire year's worth of worldwide official development assistance.⁵⁸

The link here between state failure or weakness and regional instability is not universal but obvious: when weak or failed states are contiguous, the risk of regional instability is higher. The spillover of violent conflict itself may reflect a lack of capacity or will. Some governments are unable to control cross-border activities of rebel groups operating from their territory. The most salient governance gap here is inability to provide public security. Other governments adopt a conscious policy of destabilizing their neighbors. In this case, internal weakness and external aggression tend to reflect authoritarian political institutions.

A Road Map for Policy

Although more research is clearly warranted, it is not too soon to offer some recommendations for a more effective U.S. strategy toward weak and failing states. In developing this new strategy, policymakers must be better equipped with the tools to calculate what countries are at risk from which particular threats when determining when and how the United States should become involved. The strategy should have at least three components lacking in current U.S. policy: deeper intelligence collection and analysis on the links between state weakness and transnational threats; improved policy coherence to integrate all instruments of U.S. national influence in crisis countries; and robust international engagement to leverage efforts of partners and allies who share Washington's interest in stemming the negative spillovers of state weakness in the developing world.

To determine where U.S. involvement is warranted and to tailor state-building efforts in a manner that mitigates the most salient dangers, policymakers must first be able to anticipate which threats are likely to arise from particular countries. For one, they should recall the distinction between state capacity and will as determinants of good governance and state functionality. One testable hypothesis is that a weak state’s propensity to generate spillovers, as well as the nature of these threats, will vary according to whether that weakness is a function of capacity, will, or both. The initial analysis above suggests that weak capacity is especially conducive to health epidemics and small arms proliferation, that inadequate will is often central to terrorism and WMD proliferation, and that both play roles in transnational organized crime, energy insecurity, and regional instability (see table 3). All things being equal, it is reasonable to predict that countries lacking both capacity and will for good governance should generate the most transnational threats. Accordingly, it should be expected that the six categories of spillovers—terrorism, proliferation, crime, health, energy, and regional instability—will cluster around such states. A related hypothesis is that states that are irresponsible as well as or instead of being powerless should be more likely to generate transnational threats that are not merely malignant, such as epidemics, but also malevolent, such as terrorism and weapons proliferation.

A second set of hypotheses links particular transnational threats to specific shortcomings in state performance. Weak states suffer from one or more of four functional gaps, in their ability to provide physical security, legitimate political institutions, effective economic management, or basic social welfare. Although any such hypotheses would need to be refined, it seems reasonable to predict that those states most associated either with transnational terrorism, proliferation risks, or regional instability would

Table 3: Tentative Links between Capacity/Will and Transnational Threats

	Capacity	Will
Terrorism		X
WMD Proliferation		X
Small Arms Proliferation	X	
Crime	X	X
Disease	X	
Energy Insecurity	X	X
Regional Instability	X	X

have shortcomings in security and political capacities; that infectious disease would rank low on social welfare, particularly health investments; and that transnational-crime as well as energy-insecurity candidates would lack stable political and economic institutions (see table 4). Assessing these hypotheses will require breaking state strength down into its component parts and testing whether gaps in these areas correlate with the relevant threats.

A third testable hypothesis would be that some categories of threats are more closely correlated with the weakest quintile of states, whereas others are more typical of the next higher tier. The concept of spillover, after all, implies a transnational connection. In some cases, such as violent conflicts or epidemics, spillovers can travel fairly easily from the weakest states. In other cases, including WMD proliferation and some forms of crime, the transnational diffusion of threats is more likely to come from states that are superficially strong but possess critical “sovereignty holes” and that provide easy access to the transportation, communications, and financial infrastructure of the global economy. If this hypothesis is borne out in empirical analysis, the implication is profound. A state need not possess capacity or commitment gaps across the board to pose a major risk of spillovers. A few critical gaps can make all the difference and should be targeted by external actors.

Working from these hypotheses, policymakers can begin to assemble a more effective strategy to address the specific threats presented by different characteristics of weak and failing states. Since late 2004, the National Intelligence Council has prepared a semiannual “Instability Watch List” that identifies countries at risk of state failure within two years. Although this development is welcome, busy policymakers find only marginal utility in periodic warning products that resemble the “conventional wisdom watch,” with the requisite up and down arrows, that appears in *U.S. News and World*

Table 4: Tentative Links between Governance Gaps and Transnational Threats

	Political	Security	Economic	Social
Terrorism	X	X		
Weapons Proliferation	X	X		
Crime	X		X	
Disease				X
Energy Insecurity	X		X	
Regional Instability	X	X		

Report or *Newsweek*. To be useful, such a list should also be accompanied by a consequences matrix that outlines not only the potential negative developments within each country but also the implications of such turmoil for transnational threats such as disruption of oil supplies, regional instability, or WMD proliferation likely to affect U.S. national security interests. A sophisticated early-warning system could help policymakers determine where to devote U.S. efforts and help them build the political will for effective preventive action.

There is no one-size-fits-all response to the sources or consequences of weakness.

In addition, the U.S. government must replace its current fragmented approach to weak and failing states with a truly integrated strategy that allows it to bring all relevant tools of national power to bear in the service of coherent country plans. The State Department and Pentagon have made recent, modest progress in creating standing capacities to stabilize and rebuild war-torn societies, and they are begin-

ning to coordinate the civilian and military sides of these undertakings. There has been no similar effort to define a unified interagency strategy to prevent states from sliding into failure and violence in the first place. Too often, Washington's engagement with weak states is in practice little more than a collection of independent bilateral diplomatic, military, aid, trade, and financial relationships, influenced by the institutional mandates and bureaucratic hobbyhorses of respective agencies. What is missing is a coordinated approach uniting the three Ds of U.S. foreign policy—defense, development, and diplomacy—as well as intelligence, financial, and trade policies. Integration must occur not only in Washington but also at U.S. embassies, within country teams under the direction of the ambassador. The precise country strategy will vary according to the perceived root causes of weakness. Where capacity is lacking, the United States should enable states to fill the gaps. Where will is lacking, the United States should deploy incentives to persuade or compel a stronger commitment. Where both are absent, the United States must try to change the attitudes of the country's leadership while working with civil society to build basic capacities and empower agents of reform.

Finally, the United States must spearhead a more coherent multilateral response to the linked challenges of state weakness and global threats. National governments and intergovernmental organizations are groping for new mechanisms and instruments to prevent and respond to state failure, but similar to internal U.S. efforts, progress has been hampered by fragmented institutional mandates. The United States should advance common approaches to state-building and transnational threats within the G-8, the

UN, NATO, the Organization of American States, the OECD, and the World Bank and within regional bodies to which it does not belong, such as the European Union, the African Union, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Such leadership would provide a tangible expression of the administration's espoused commitment to effective multilateral cooperation and of its willingness to help faltering states offer better futures to their citizens. This mission can unite developed and developing countries. Although transnational dangers are reshaping the rich world's security agenda, the poor countries nevertheless remain the main victims of global dangers such as crime, disease, and terrorism.

Weak and failing states can and do generate transnational spillovers such as terrorism, weapons proliferation, crime, disease, energy insecurity, and regional instability that endanger U.S. national interests and international security. At the same time, the blanket equation of weak states and global threats provides only modest analytic insights and even less practical guidance for policymakers. Each poorly performing country suffers from a distinctive set of pathologies and generates a unique mixture of challenges, of varying gravity.⁵⁹ There can be no one-size-fits-all response to addressing either the sources or consequences of these weaknesses. At a practical level, neither the United States nor its allies have the unlimited resources or attention spans required to launch ambitious state-building exercises in all corners of the world. U.S. officials will thus need to investigate the sources and consequences of transnational threats better and subsequently be able to set priorities and make tough choices about where, when, and how to engage weak and failing states to improve U.S. and international security.

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