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THE PHENOMENON OF FRAGILE STATES: THE CONCEPTUAL DEBATE, IMPLICATIONS AND GLOBAL RESPONSE

Abstract

This article focuses on the conceptual debate surrounding the notion of fragile states. The argument in the paper is predominantly focused on theoretical parameters of fragile states developed both by donor driven knowledge and academics in the Post-Cold War period. The objectives are, first, to shed light on different views on conceptual understanding of fragile states, in order to establish if it is true, as some contend, that the idea of fragile state is nothing new and we have seen most of it before in different expressions. It is to show how conceptions of fragile states are reflected in the grand narratives of donor agencies and countries. And, second, to foreground specific challenges fragile states are posing to the global community and what global response is available to revitalize fragile states. The paper argues that the donor-driven framework is too reductive and deterministic in its assumptions regarding fragile states. So it requires producing new and historically unique mixes of the national and the global domains. The paper also argues that there is a need for more academic engagement on fragile states which would help further refining of our conceptual framework to understand various dimensions of fragile states.

1. INTRODUCTION

As historical phenomena, constructed under particular conditions, states have been at the centre of debate since the Treaty of Westphalia signed in 1648 following the end of the Thirty Years' War. The debate has been widened and deepened in the aftermath of the demise of the Cold War. Despite a considerable degree of controversy about its nature, characteristics, and role, global order is still dominated by the nation-state. As an actor, it still draws enormous attention, for organizing collective action. According to Hobson, the world has been

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witnessing 'second state debate' in social sciences since the late 1990s.¹ Several categories are commonly applied to understand state's capacity, performance, changes and dynamics in the present day world. Some of these categories include 'competition state', 'failed state', 'crisis state', 'fragile state', 'rogue state', 'weak state', 'ineffective state', 'murderous state', 'vulnerable states,' 'poorly performing', 'ineffective', or 'shadow', 'neo-patrimonial states', 'warlord states', 'quasi states', a 'country at risk of instability' or 'under stress', or even a 'difficult partner' and so on. Placed along a 'developmental continuum', states are often characterized as 'strong', 'weak', 'failed' and 'collapsed'.² Most of these categories are highly political and controversial such as 'rogue states,' 'failed states', 'collapsed states,' and 'fragile states'. These ideas are basically a product of a new discourse on state developed first in the Post-Cold War era and, subsequently, in the context of post-9/11 scenarios.

Fragile State (FS) is one of such categories that capture a prominent position in the larger debate on the efficacy of state in the contemporary international relations. In fact, it is becoming a critical challenge in the current global system, but there has been a less academic analysis on this matter. According to a report by the Department for International Development (DFID), UK, there is a list of 46 fragile states in the world, containing 870 million people or 14% of the world's population.³ Interestingly, there is also a tendency to substitute the term 'fragile' by 'failed', 'failing', 'crisis', 'weak', 'rogue', 'collapsed', 'poorly performing', 'ineffective', or 'shadow', a 'country at risk of instability' or 'under stress', or even a 'difficult partner' without a precise change in the meaning.⁴ Attempts to analyze state fragility scientifically began in earnest in the 1990s. Against this backdrop, the paper explores the nature of fragile states with particular focus on their capacity and sustainability in the era of a global age. The pivotal reference point is the Post-Cold War era. This also implies that although this period is understood as broad historical process, it comprises different sub-phases (in varying national configurations). The argument in the paper is

¹ John M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

² David Carment, "Assessing State Failure: Implications for Theory and Policy", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2003, pp.407-427.

³ A proxy list of fragile states (1999-2003) includes: Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Myanmar, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Dem Rep of Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Eritrea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Georgia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Liberia, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Rep of Congo, São Tomé & Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor Leste, Tonga, Togo, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

⁴ Diana Cammack, *et. al.*, *Donors and the 'Fragile States' Agenda: A Survey of Current Thinking and Practice*, Report submitted to the Japan International Cooperation Agency, London: ODI Poverty and Public Policy Group, 2006.

predominantly focused on theoretical parameters of fragile states developed both by donor driven knowledge and academics in the Post-Cold War period.

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In this light, the paper sets out to:

- analyze the changing nature of state (section 1);
- review the underlying political or ideological rationale and the principal agents behind the debate on fragile states and, in this context, probe into the donors' view and its critics (section 2);
- identify the key attributes of fragile states in order to create its profile (section 3);
- assess the impact of the syndrome of fragile states – its presence or absence, legitimacy or non-legitimacy, old or new discursive forms - at regional and global contexts (section 4); and
- finally, reflect on the global response to deal with fragile states in real life context.

1. CHANGING NATURE OF STATE IN THE POST-WAR ERA

Since the focus of the paper is on state, it is necessary to deal with the question of how state has been adjusting to changing context of local and global politics. Although it has a long historical background, in this section, the focus is given on the Post-War era. A typical definition of state is that it is a territorial entity controlled by a government and inhabited by a population. Theoretically, a state government answers to no higher authority; it exercises sovereignty over its territory to make and enforce laws, to collect taxes, and so forth.⁵ Based on this definition, state has not changed much after the World War II. It continues to remain the same by its functions and authority. However, the Cold War dominated global system imposed some constraints on the behaviour of states in relation to state sovereignty and independence. The emergence and ascendancy of two superpowers – the USA and the former Soviet Union – curtailed authority of state over its external behaviour and policy response. It did not reduce the capacity and power of states in exercising its full authority internally. Rather it has strengthened the power of the state over society/citizens. This situation has started to change since the late 1980s and culminated in the early 1990s through the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a superpower.

⁵ Joshua S. Goldstein, *International Relations*, New York: Pearson Longman, 2005, p.10.

Four critical factors are identified to understand the role of state in the changing milieu of international politics in the Post-Cold War era. Firstly, state sovereignty is the most important norm guiding the behaviour of nation-states. Sovereignty is an institution, a set of norms and rules that include normative statements regarding authority and international recognition. It is often seen as the 'immoveable cornerstone' of world order. The Post-War global system consists of states that are treated in equal terms in their juridical sovereignty despite the inequality among them with regard to size, population, resources, military capability etc. Traditionally, by sovereignty it is meant that a government has the right to do whatever it wants in its own territory. In principle, all states are equal in status if not in power. Sovereignty also means that states are not supposed to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. Sovereignty is defined as referring to final and absolute political authority in the political community. But continued viability of state sovereignty has been questioned during both Cold War and Post-Cold War periods. During the Cold War era, Western governments often saw their own national security linked to trends and events in the developing world (e.g. Angola and Vietnam). The two superpowers imposed constraints on the behaviour of states within their respective power bloc and beyond. As Ayoob observes, "At the height of the Cold War, the superpowers often attempted to shore up client governments in internally fragmented states in order to maintain a semblance of stability in countries that were their allies."⁶ If we accept the singular, unified view of sovereignty, it is no wonder that the contemporary period has seen so many works declaring sovereignty to be threatened by the increase in global flows, growing economic and political interdependence, and the rise of supranational political entities that make delineation of sovereignty more problematic.⁷

In the contemporary period, state behaviour has been marked by two distinct sovereignty bargains. First, in the economic realm, interdependence sovereignty is willingly ceded in order to bolster Westphalian and domestic sovereignty. Second, in the societal realm, Westphalian sovereignty has been increasingly ceded in order to bolster interdependence sovereignty (control over migration flows), domestic sovereignty (the relationship between government and polity), and societal sovereignty (identity).⁸ In terms of sovereignty, the 9/11 event certainly raised the stakes concerning the importance of interdependence sovereignty as a prerequisite to defending other aspects of sovereignty. Ghani *et al.* talk about sovereignty strategies to face the constraints in the current global

⁶ Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Predicament: State-making, Regional Conflict and the International System*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1995.

⁷ Christopher Rudolph, "Sovereignty and Territorial Border in a Global Age", *International Studies Review* (2005), 7, p.3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

system.⁹ The gap between *de jure* sovereignty and *de facto* sovereignty in failing and fragile states has widened in the wake of 9/11.

Box-1: The ten functions of the state

- *legitimate monopoly on the means of violence*
- *administrative control*
- *management of public finances*
- *investment in human capital*
- *delineation of citizenship rights and duties*
- *provision of infrastructure services*
- *rule of law*
- *management of the state's assets (including the environment, natural resources, and cultural assets)*
- *international relations (including entering into international contracts and public borrowing)*
- *formation of the market*

Source: Ghani et al, 2005.

A significant change is observed between the Cold War and Post-Cold War phases. Current processes of globalization, the rise of non-state political actors, and the proliferation of human rights norms suggest that sovereignty is in decline.¹⁰ States are becoming increasingly enmeshed in a network of collaborative arrangements or regimes that are creating a very different international political world than the one that has existed in recent centuries. Susan Strange had a similar point of view, arguing that the Westphalian system was being swept away by the global changes evident in our contemporary world.¹¹ Other analysts such as Sassen and Rosenau have added that these processes of globalisation are eroding the fundamental basis of international society, state sovereignty, and that its decline represents a revolutionary transformation in the Westphalian structure of the international system.¹²

⁹ Ashraf Ghani, *et. al.* "Closing the Sovereignty Gap: An Approach to State-Building", *Working Paper 253*. London: Overseas Development Institute, 2005.

¹⁰ Mark W. Zacher, "The Decaying Pillars of the Westphalian Temple: Implications for International Order and Governance" in *The New Political Economy of Globalisation* edited by Richard Higgott and Anthony Payne, London: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2000. G. Gottlieb, *Nation against State: A New Approach to Ethnic Conflicts and the Decline of Sovereignty*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1993. Fowler and Bunck, *Law, Power and the Sovereign State: The Evolution and Application of the Concept of Sovereignty*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

¹¹ Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

¹² Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalisation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. Saskia Sassen, *Globalisation and Its Discontents*, New York: New Press, 1998. James N. Rosenau, "The Dynamics of Globalization: Toward an

Secondly, another powerful concept is territoriality of a state. States are based on territory. Respect for territorial integrity of all states, within recognized borders, is an important principle of global politics. Under the Westphalian system, borders clearly demarcated "outside" from "inside" and established the "ultimate" authority of the state within its domain.¹³ Many of the today's borders are result of past wars, or were imposed arbitrarily by third parties such as colonizers. Despite such limitations, the global system places the highest value on respect for internationally recognized borders.

Thirdly, changes may be seen in delivering the core functions of the state. As box 1 demonstrates, state renders some core functions to continuously survive and succeed in the world. These functions were regarded vital for the survival of states. It is being robbed of a number of the functions it was meant to serve and which were imparted to it during the Cold War era. Finally, it may be stressed that in doing the core functions nation-state in the current world confronts a complex external environment where a diverse array of actors interact. The major components of this external environment as clearly envisaged by Ghani *et. al.* are mentioned in box-2. State confronts a world in the 1990s marked by a set of problems that had been largely unanticipated on such a scale: state failure, civil and sectarian intrastate wars, small arms proliferation, increase in mercenary armies, civilian victims, genocide, natural resource conflict, complex humanitarian crises, deepening inter-generational poverty, droughts and famine, HIV/AIDS, global criminal networks and violent non-state actors.¹⁴ In the neo-Malthusian perspective the world—especially the South—is beset by increasing crises generated by fast-growing populations, demographic changes and weakening state capacity to regulate conflict. Despite some changes, state is still the repository of images and emotions deriving from Cold War, if not much before.

Box-2: External environment

- *Global trade system*
- *Global aid system*
- *Global security system*
- *Global and regional corporations*
- *Global civil society networks*
- *Global media*
- *Global and regional networks of knowledge*

Source: Ghani et al, 2005.

Operational Formulation" in *The New Political Economy of Globalisation* edited by Richard Higgott and Anthony Payne, London: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2000.

¹³ John H. Herz, "Rise and Demise of the Territorial State", *World Politics* (1957) 9:473–493. Kratochwil, Friedrich, "Of Systems, Boundaries, and Territoriality", *World Politics* (1986) 39:27–52.

¹⁴ Cammack *et. al.*, *op. cit.*

2. ASPECTS OF THE CONCEPTUAL DEBATE ON FRAGILE STATES

The idea of fragile states sparks off a serious debate both at scholarly and popular levels. Some analysts see it as a buzzword or a catch phrase, while some find it as another Western idea to dominate politics in the South. To many, this debate is often reduced to the talk of sovereignty of the state. Besides, unlike the 'failed states' category, there is no list or ranking of fragile states based on specific index. This has further complicated the issue of understanding fragile states. One way to understand the debate on fragile states is to focus on donors' perspective and its critics. It appears that the donors are the leading advocates of this concept. Another way is to highlight academic stream of thought where various theoretical traditions and multidimensional factors are addressed.

2.1 Donors' View of Fragile States

Donor-directed and policy oriented discourse on fragile states has developed over the last few years which has been increasingly dominating the literature on the subject. Donor agencies and states such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), and Germany have produced several policy papers on failing and collapsing states. Some of the policy papers specifically deal with fragile states. Ruysseenaars identifies three sets of factors to understand donors' view on fragile states or so. First, a declining scale with state functions becoming weaker and falling away, with states eventually collapsing (Cambodia in the '80s, Somalia in the '90s, Former Yugoslavia in the '90s, Sierra Leone more recently.) Second, decline in legitimacy of the administration, in delivery of services, in capacity to guarantee safety and security for its citizens. Third, increase of chaos and anarchy, non-state actors, inflow of smaller and medium weight arms, increasing violence, refugees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹⁵ Among the donor agencies, DFID produced an authoritative and comprehensive report on fragile states in 2005 entitled *Why We Need to Work More Effectively in Fragile States*.¹⁶ It defines fragile states based on World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessments (CPIA) scores. In this context, fragile states are those:

where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor. The most important functions of the state for poverty reduction are territorial control, safety and security, capacity to manage

¹⁵ Speech by Jan Ruysseenaars, Novib-Oxfam Netherlands (for the Reality of Aid Coalition) in the OECD-DAC Development Committee, Paris, 24 June 2005.

¹⁶ The Department for International Development, *Why We Need to Work More Effectively in Fragile States*, London: DFID, 2005.

public resources, delivery of basic services, and the ability to protect and support the ways in which the poorest people sustain themselves.¹⁷

DFID emphasizes two central issues – capacity and political willingness – to determine whether a state is regarded as fragile state or not. It acknowledges the fact that all states are fragile in some respects and states move in and out of fragility. Factors which are particularly important to understand why fragile states matter in the world include widespread poverty, low progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and regional and global instability.¹⁸ The USAID launched a report entitled *Fragile States Strategy* in 2005 focusing more on the challenges of fragile states and strategies to deal with them. It deserves tremendous attention as far as donors' view is concerned. According to the USAID report, fragile states generally refer to a broad range of failing, failed and recovering states.¹⁹ The USAID has subdivided fragile states into crisis and vulnerable states. Some of the illustrative cases of crisis states are Afghanistan, Sudan, El Salvador, and Sierra Leone, while vulnerable states include Indonesia, Serbia-Montenegro and Macedonia.

Another report entitled *Donors and the 'Fragile States' Agenda: A Survey of Current Thinking and Practice* submitted to the JICA deserves special mentioning. It deals with fragility as the key factor to understand fragile states. According to this report, fragility is variously defined in terms of the functionality of states, of their outputs (including insecurity), or of their relationship with donors.²⁰ This report clearly reviews the fragile states (FS) agenda in policy outcomes of different donor nations such as USA, UK, and Germany. In this report, it has been emphasized that the conceptualization of fragile states varies country to country, agencies to agencies as the definition of fragile state is essentially 'all things to all people' but individual to agencies depending on their analysis of the causes, characteristics and consequences of state fragility.²¹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ USAID, *Fragile States Strategy*, USAID, 2005.

http://www.usaid.gov/policy/2005_fragile_states_strategy.pdf accessed on 25 May 2007.

²⁰ Cammack *et. al.*, *op. cit.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

Box-3: Selective Donors' Definitions

EU (European Council) *In many parts of the world bad governance, civil conflict, and the easy availability of small arms have led to a weakening of state and social structures. In some cases, this has brought about something close to the collapse of state institutions.*

Germany *Fragile and failed states are characterized by a 'gradual collapse of state structures and a lack of good governance'.*

UK (DFID) *DFID does not limit its definition of fragile states to those affected by conflict. Fragile states include those where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor. The most important functions of the state for poverty reduction are territorial control, safety and security, capacity to manage public resources, delivery of basic services, and the ability to protect and support the ways in which the poorest people sustain themselves.*

UN (UNDP) *WB LICUS definition, with outcomes measured in terms of human development indicators and MDGs.*

US (USAID) *Failed states are characterized by a growing inability or unwillingness to assure provision of even basic services and security to their populations.*

WB LICUS *are characterized by very weak policies, institutions and governance. Aid does not work well in these environments because governments lack the capacity or inclination to use finance effectively for poverty reduction. The WB's CPIA ranks countries in terms of their economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion and public sector management and institutions.*

Source: Cited in Cammack et al 2006.

Despite such diversity in goals and concerns, donors seem to have reached a consensus on FS agenda. The main components of the FS agenda as the report stresses include local peace, human security and basic needs; economic development and good governance; and global security.²² It is mentioned in the report that a donor agency or a group of donor agencies highlight a particular component in their aid policies. This report has categorically identified the cases of fragile states – Afghanistan, Cambodia and Nepal – which give a clear understanding of donors' view on FS. By these case studies, this report gives an idea about the underlying causes behind state fragility. These are quite varied and comprehensive. While it identifies causes of state fragility in Afghanistan and Nepal, it skips such attempts in Cambodia except blaming the past actions of donors behind state fragility. The Crisis States Research Centre (CSRC) gives a precise and a clear definition of fragile states. It goes,

'A fragile state is a state significantly susceptible to crisis in one or more of its sub-systems. (It is a state that is particularly vulnerable to internal and external

²² *Ibid.*

shocks and domestic and international conflicts).²³ In fragile states, statutory institutional arrangements are vulnerable to challenges by rival institutional systems be they derived from traditional authorities, devised by communities under conditions of stress that see little of the state (in terms of security, development or welfare), or be they derived from warlords, or other non-state power brokers.²⁴

In addition, Box-3 gives some selective definitions by several donor agencies and states which contribute to have better understanding of donors' view on fragile states. Some of these definitions do not directly deal with fragile states, but they express the same underlying concerns in different ways.

Thus, donors' community has developed a well focused conceptual framework for understanding fragile states in their own terms. Not surprisingly, it suffers from some drawbacks. First, critics argue that donors' explanations for fragility of states seem to be static, a-historic, technical and functionalistic. Such explanations may lead to "quick solutions" without longer-term structural impact. For instance, policy reports of donors place their aid policies and their effectiveness on top of all issues and concerns overlooking the real needs and conditions of fragile states as they term so. Second, donors' view on fragile states creates confusion, because they substitute this category with others such as crisis, vulnerable (USAID), failed, failing, weak, etc. (DFID). Third, there is a tendency by donors driven idea of fragile states is to prepare an index or indicators or any other attempt to quantify an abstract notion which does not give a real picture of phenomena. It appears that donors perceive state as companies or business enterprises which can be fragile or failed and eventually declared 'insolvent'. Fourth, much less attention has been paid to the question of how to expand and deepen their policy foci and to link them to theoretical insights. Fifth, the societal aspect of fragility remains ignored in donor-driven framework of understanding. Some analysts argue that if states are fragile, it is because their societies are fragile as well. The breakdown of social bond is a critical issue.²⁵ Finally, donors tend to emphasize performance of state apparently in absolute terms. As Carment argues, the proper referents for understanding fragile state are not only a state's own past, present and future performance in absolute terms but its performance relative to other states at any given point.²⁶ The rate of change (which is understood by examining a state's relative performance as opposed to absolute performance), whether progressive or regressive, tells us whether a state is

²³ This definition is used in *Crisis States Workshop* – London, March 2006. <http://www.crisisstates.com/download/drc/FailedState.pdf> accessed on 23 March 2007.

²⁴ This definition is used in *Crisis States Workshop* – London, March 2006. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fragile_state accessed on 15 March 2007.

²⁵ Jean-Marc Châtaigner and François Gaulme, *Beyond the Fragile State: Taking Action to Assist Fragile Actors and Societies, Working Paper 4*, November 2005, Paris: Agence Française de Développement.

²⁶ Carment, *op. cit.*

moving either towards being fragile or strong.²⁷ The fragile state literature by donors' agencies and states demonstrates a limited understanding of the reality, since they are confined within particular policy agenda.

2.2 Beyond the Donor Driven Framework

Although donor driven paradigm has been dominating the theoretical literature on fragile state, it is critical to look at the academic stream of thought on this issue. One analyst observes that fragile states are considered to be the precursors of collapsed or failed states. To him, fragility of a state is the sign of its societal collapse and not of its own collapse.²⁸ It does not give a clear idea about fragile states. It may be useful for defining fragile states if different theoretical approaches are properly considered. A combination of these theoretical traditions would help understand the complex whole. According to realist/neo-realist arguments, conditions of a state are not important as they may change over time. A state may remain weak for a certain period of time, but not fragile since there is no alternative to state system. A weak state strives to become strong and maintain its authority internally and externally. A state can only become interested in finding the problems of other states, for that matter, fragile or failed states as it may enhance its own power.

On the other hand, the theoretical orientation of neo-liberalism is that it is a political project that is primarily concerned to promote a market-led changes and the focus is on the individual as the explanatory factor in the analysis of state, market and economy. So, the neo-liberalists perceive the phenomenon of fragile states primarily from an economic perspective prompted by market ideologies with substantive role of the non-state actors. The liberal view makes other states interested in fragile states since the current world is marked by the higher stage of interdependence.²⁹ Neo-liberals are fairly interested in matters related to fragile state. In fact, the existing literature on fragile state is dominated by neo-liberal thinking. Theoretically, neo-liberalism has no conflict with the centrality of state. However, it gives significant space to non-state actors such as multinational corporations (MNCs) or Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The problem with neo-liberal view is that it is too economy oriented.

Compared to realism/neo-realism and neo-liberalism, constructivism has more relevance to explain fragile states. In recent years, constructivism has emerged as a powerful theory to explain different phenomena. Based on the

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Abul Kalam Azad, "Collapsed State in Contemporary International Politics", *BISS Journal*, Vol. 24, No. January 2003, p.37.

²⁹ Interdependence raised a major theoretical debate in the 1970s between the neo-liberalists and neo-realists. Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr. have extensively dealt with this issue. See for details, Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, New York: Addison-Wesley, 1977.

conceptual puzzle of 'anarchy is what states make of it'.³⁰ The constructivist approaches emphasize the impact of cultural and ideational factors. Instead of taking the state for granted and assuming that it simply seeks to survive, constructivists regard the interests and identities of states as a highly malleable product of specific historical processes.³¹ It emphasizes how ideas and identities are created, how they evolve, and how they shape the way states understand and respond to their situation.³² In this context it may be argued that fragility is what states make of it. The other theoretical streams such as the Marxists and neo-Marxists consider state a coercive means and hence it requires withering away. They find no relevance to delve into the study on fragile states.

2.3 Fragile States and Nation-Building Process

Conceptualization of fragile states should be linked with nation-state building process. A state is weak or fragile because it has failed in its nation-state building capacity for ensuring political, economic and social stability in its polity. The failure in state building process provides an explanatory variable as to how a transition from state weakness or fragility to state collapse or failure becomes possible. It is argued that the success in performing the core functions of a state largely depends on how a state could build itself, in other words, its achievements in state making or state building. State building is the process by which the state not only grows in economic productivity and government coercion but, also in political and institutional power.³³ It may be mentioned that state building could not pave the way for nation-building. For many developing countries, social cohesion remains a formidable challenge for the state. They have been struggling for a viable political system where the rulers and the 'ruled' live together without much mistrust, tension and unrest.

The reality suggests that the Third World states have not advanced much in this regard. The dynamics of conflict, security and social change in the developing world cannot be properly conceptualized without understanding the process of nation-building. The post-colonial states in Africa, Asia and Latin America tried to pursue modernization and development within a capitalist framework with a view to generating more wealth, consolidating the nation and making the state strong against internal and external threats. But they have not been able to ensure political stability and promote loyalty to the state from all sections and groups within their societies. The paradox of the nation-state

³⁰ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organization*, (1992) 46 (2).

³¹ Stephen Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories", *Foreign Policy*, No. 110, Spring 1998, p.40.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Cited in Ayoob, Mohammed, *The Third World Predicament: State-making, Regional Conflict and the International System*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1995.

building enterprise in these post-colonial state-nations has produced a hegemonic role of small elite class over their multi-ethnic societies.³⁴ It appears that these have resulted in the intensification of conflicts and an increasing use of violence in the articulation of demands. As a consequence, they are experiencing difficult times to consolidate a viable political order that would contribute to development and security in these states. This is why fragility in these states can be seen as a part of their ongoing struggle with nation-building process.

2.4 Defining Fragile States

Based on donors' concern, academic knowledge, and nation-building process in the Third World, fragility can be understood as a condition where the constituting elements of a state and different organs of the government remain largely ineffective under pressures from within and outside. It has to be understood by multidimensional factors critically *linked with the capacity of state to deliver collective goods*. What agentive power a state has is the primary concern. In this connection, one has to assess the agentive power of the state. There are two categories of agentive powers of the state – the domestic agential power and the international agentive power.³⁵ The domestic agential power refers to the ability of the state to make domestic or foreign policy as well as shape the domestic realm, free of domestic social-structural requirements or the interests of non-state actors. The international agential power refers to the ability of the state to make foreign policy and shape the international realm, free of international structural requirements or the interests of international non-state actors.³⁶ The agentive power of the state largely depends on its overall capacity to perform its functions. Thus for the purpose of our study, *a fragile state is defined as a state facing a condition of statehood where the state in question substantively loses its domestic and international agentive powers to organize its collective action, in other words, to perform core functions of state.*

Another issue is at what point a state may be regarded as fragile state? In this sense, fragility of a state can be seen as one of the extremes to a continuum (see Figure-2) which has various dimensions - development, security and cultural. There is also a degree of fragility – low and high.

³⁴ Ajay Darshan Behera, "The Politics of Violence and Development in South Asia", *Policy Studies* 6, Colombo, RCSS, 1999.

³⁵ John M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.7.

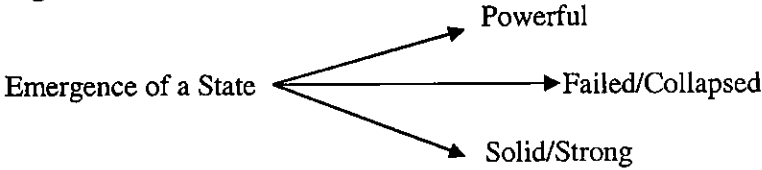
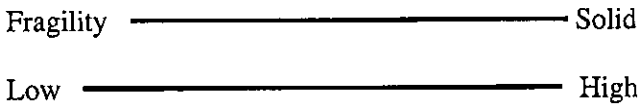
Figure-1: Directions of State**Figure-2: The Fragility Continuum**

Figure-1 shows that historically a state can emerge at a certain point of time. Since its emergence, this state can take three directions/courses in its journey of statehood. It can become powerful or become failed/collapsed or strong. In this journey a state can advance or retreat depending on its performance in different spheres. This retreat from the path of becoming strong is understood as fragile at a certain point of its history. It can change its course from one to another. So, a fragile state can become strong or powerful by changing its course of becoming failed or collapsed. It is not a linear process. The development of political capacity, legitimacy and authority, all essential features of state building, is not a linear process. This is especially relevant to explain fragile states, since changing environmental conditions can reverse (in very short periods of time, e.g. months and years) these essential features and, thus, reducing fragility.

3. THE KEY ATTRIBUTES OF FRAGILE STATE

What are the key attributes of fragile states? Before identifying the key attributes or theoretical parameters of fragile states, it is important to understand the causes behind fragility. According to one DFID report entitled *Drivers of Fragility: What Makes States Fragile?*, weak institutions are the central driver of state fragility. Other factors associated with fragility include: economic development, violent conflict, natural resources, external shocks and the international system.³⁷ Box-4 shows that several factors drive a state becoming fragile.³⁸ Although it varies country to country, some factors are commonly observed. These include extreme and pervasive poverty; protracted civil wars or violent conflicts; continued factionalism and tribalism; post-conflict chaotic scenarios; lack of adequate representative institutions; poor provision of basic social services; structural discrimination; massive corruption.

³⁷ DFID, *op. cit.*

³⁸ It may be mentioned that the situation in Nepal has dramatically improved since the conclusion of general elections held in April 2008.

Box-4: Causes behind Fragility in Afghanistan and Nepal

Afghanistan	Nepal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive IDP and refugees; • Deep poverty and poor social and human development indicators; • Devastation of infrastructure by war and drought; • Rugged terrain and extreme weather; • Tension among factions of the national government; • Continued fighting among warlords; • More than five million land mines; • Traditional and religious restrictions, especially for women; • Ongoing insecurity caused by the war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. • Poor coordination and communication between the central government and regional leaders; • Weak national and local level government institutions; • Corruption and narcotic trafficking; • Incomplete and ineffective decentralization processes; • Regional complications from aggressive neighboring states. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption; • Endemic infighting between political parties; • Lack of adequate representative institutions at both the national and the local levels; • Poor transparency and accountability; • Poor provision of basic social services; • Stark regional imbalances; • Structural discrimination; • Concentration of economic growth in urban areas (which account for less than 20% of the total population).

Source: Cammack et al 2006.

In the context of Africa, Charles Alao argues that the causes of state weakness, for that matter fragility in Africa during the post-independence and Post-Cold War periods were a result of the way African states were formed. To him, the process was dominated by colonialism which brought people of different ethnic, political and religious affiliations together to form a state and forge a common sense of citizenship. In addition, most African economies were incorporated into the European capitalist framework, which made most of these economies structurally too weak to cope with the challenges of nation building.³⁹

³⁹ Charles Alao identifies a number of interrelated factors. These include weak state structures and their inability to cope with Post-Cold War transition; deteriorating economic conditions; and the rise in ethnic conflict. See Charles Alao, "The Problem of the Failed State in Africa", in Muthiah Alagappa & Takashi Inoguchi, (eds), *International Security Management and the United Nations* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press), 1999, pp. 83-102. See also, Gerald B Helman & Steven R Ratner, "Saving Failed States", *Foreign Policy*, 89, 1992/93, pp. 3-20.

Figure-3: DFID's Indicative Features of Fragile States

	Capacity	Willingness
State authority for safety and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state lacks clear international sovereign status. • The state cannot control its external borders or significant parts of its internal territory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or more groups are systematically subjected to violence or deliberately not provided security by the state.
Effective political power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The power of the executive is not subject to controls, either through informal (political party) or formal (legislature) channels. • There are no effective channels for political participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major groups are systematically excluded from political processes.
Economic management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak or partial public financial management tools, such as a budget cycle and planning processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no transparency in the public management of natural resource extraction.
Administrative capacity to deliver services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state levies less than 15% of GDP in tax. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to public services for specific regions of the country or groups is deliberately limited.

Source: DFID, 2005.

Neo-liberal globalization and the roles of World Bank, IMF and WTO in this have helped undermine the functioning of states (Debts, Structural Adjustment Programs, privatization trends). Colonial history, bad governance, lack of social and political space for minorities, poor ecological situations and scarcity of land and water, and many other aspects need to be taken into account. While considering the specific parameters through which a fragile state could be identified, it is suggestive to focus on the indicators developed by the donor agencies. In this regard, the contribution of DFID is worth mentioning. Figure-3 demonstrates that there are four broad fields of indicators to identify a fragile state by focusing on its capacity and political willingness.

Conceptually, indicators developed by DFID and other donor agencies have relevance to understand fragile states. Besides, Failed States Index of Fund for Peace based in Washington, D.C., USA (see Appendix-1) and Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (see Appendix-2) by Carleton University have also some relevance. Partly based on the findings of these works and partly based on changing nature, functions and dynamics of states, some theoretical parameters

of fragile states may be identified. First, there is the political element, i.e. the core political institutions (legislature, judiciary, bureaucracy, and police) in the country remain largely ineffective for a considerable period. This may be caused by the absence of central authority or political order for a long period often generated by civil wars. Congo is an example where the law enforcing militias disintegrated into armed gangs of looters and the army set up their own units to use state owned resources for enrichment. Second, the phenomenon of fragile state is to be conceived primarily as an outcome of a diverse and complex mix of socio-economic and politico-strategic factors developed within the exclusive territorial context. Cases such as Rwanda, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Chad clearly demonstrate the internal nature of this phenomenon. Third, there is insufficient number of bodies capable of delivering collective goods to the people. It is linked with the functional aspect of fragility. State authority remains low and legitimacy mechanisms are poor for which it does not enjoy support within the country. Fourth, there is a legal dimension of fragility in relation to conducting international relations. A fragile state does not enjoy higher degree of support and acceptability in the international community. Fifth, combined pressures from geographical, geopolitical and demographic aspects may turn a state fragile. Sixth, weak civil society may contribute to fragility. Finally, the prolonged rule by non-democratic regimes and a long absence of democratic culture at societal level may lead to fragility in a state. While these attributes or theoretical parameters are not exclusive, they do help understand fragile states.

4. IMPLICATIONS OF FRAGILE STATES

America is now less threatened by conquering states than by failing ones. We are menaced less by fleets and armies than catastrophic technologies in the hands of an embittered few.

US National Security Strategy, September 2002

Instability and poor governance directly threaten the prospects for growth, prosperity and development for many countries in our region and have the potential to undermine Australia's security.

AusAID, cited by Justin Lim, 'Australia-PNG: The Politics of Aid', 2005

Fragile states are associated with serious implications in different contexts and levels. The present and future of fragile states has increasingly become a preoccupation of the international community. The growing literature on fragile states dominated by donor agencies and states has visibly identified the challenges of fragile states. First, by becoming fragile, the state in question threatens the fate of the nation-state and its functionality (or the reverse) for its own development and security. It negatively affects economy, polity and society of a country. Internally, a fragile state has little or no progress in achieving the MDGs and is unable to deliver basic social services including water, education,

and healthcare. It is weak and unresponsive government can lead to civil conflict; particularly vulnerable to humanitarian crises caused by civil war, food insecurity, or natural disasters; unable to protect the basic human rights of their citizens, giving rise to unchecked opportunities for murder, rape, slavery, mutilation, extortion, theft, intimidation, and discrimination; weak but repressive regimes may violate rights to stay in power. Thus, it becomes the biggest internal source of threats to human security.

Second, fragile states are more likely to become unstable and fall prey to criminal and terrorist networks, which aggravate insecurity and instability. The impact of instability can spread well beyond national borders, as the case with Afghanistan and Democratic Republic of Congo. Fragile states are sources of chronic refugee flows placing strain on neighbouring states and international humanitarian response. They also fuel proliferation of conventional weapons and stoke regional conflicts. They are also sources of the spread of HIV/AIDS, arms smuggling and the breakdown of trade. On average, growth is reduced by 0.4% a year if a neighbouring country is fragile.⁴⁰ The neighbouring states may be drawn into the conflict, both directly and indirectly, from the use of their territory for illicit arms trafficking to support provided by related ethnic groups. There is also a tangible risk that such conflicts will spill over into other countries.⁴¹

Finally, providing safe havens for international terrorists and illicit arms trade, lacking capacity to detect, investigate, and counter terrorist activity; ineffective controls on biological, nuclear and radioactive materials will spark global ramifications. Fragile states may serve as bases for international criminal activities, including the trafficking of drugs, people, and illegal goods. More ominous, they may serve as production sites for illicit arms, narcotics and the likes. Fragile states cause reduced global prosperity through depressing international trade and investment. They are unable to provide the regulatory framework and basic security required to promote economic growth. They also pose threats to global energy security through the disruption of energy production and/or transmission. Fragile states are unable to fulfil international obligations – protect the global environment, counter infectious disease, contain money laundering, and so on. They are also unable to fulfil obligations to other states in protecting foreign nationals, maintaining effective diplomatic relations, and cooperating to address global challenges.⁴² Specifically, for donor agencies and states, fragile states cannot meet their terms and conditions. They have difficulty in absorbing large amount of aid. They see fragility either as a threat, as a

⁴⁰ DFID, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Robert H. Dorff, "Democratization and Failed States: The Challenge of Ungovernability", *Parameters*, Summer, 1996, pp.17–31.

⁴² Moreno Torres, M. and Anderson, M. "Fragile States: Defining Difficult Environments for Poverty Reduction" *PRDE Working Paper 1*. Unpublished manuscript; London: DFID, 2004.

menace and a potential source of big problems for themselves, like masses of refugees knocking on their doors, breeding places of terrorism, loss of economic and development investment, and the likes. Donors also view fragile states as a security problem for people living in these states and their vicinity.

5. GLOBAL RESPONSE: SALVAGING AND REVITALIZING FRAGILE STATES

Fragile states do not simply go away. While in the earlier period many unviable states were annexed by or partitioned among the powerful neighbours, this is no longer feasible under the current global order.⁴³ A key question is raised: what responsibilities do other states have if a state goes through the process of decay and finally collapse, or if sub-human conditions of people of these states continue? Fragile states invite response from different levels – national, regional and global, because the continuing fragility may lead to total failure or collapse of a state. Since national and regional responses often remain ineffective and insufficient, global support becomes inevitable. Global response generally follows two types of measures for supporting fragile states – short-term and long-term.

Box 5: Matrix of humanitarian intervention – motivation and outcomes

1. Humanitarian motives, non-humanitarian outcomes – The UN intervention in Somalia from May 1993-February 1995
2. Humanitarian motives and outcomes – Northern Iraq in April 1991
3. Non-humanitarian motives and humanitarian outcomes – Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia in December 1978
4. Non-humanitarian motives and outcomes – Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979.

Source: Cited in Wheeler and Bellamy, 2005.

The explicit and important form of short-term measures consists of forcible and non-forcible humanitarian interventions (use of force, humanitarian aid, relief and others). So, clearly defined and identified fragile states certainly need intervention from external sources. Humanitarian intervention is an act that seeks to intervene to stop a government murdering its own people. According to solidarist arguments, states have both a legal and a moral obligation to intervene in exceptional cases that offend against minimum standards of humanity.⁴⁴ The

⁴³ Azad, *op. cit.*

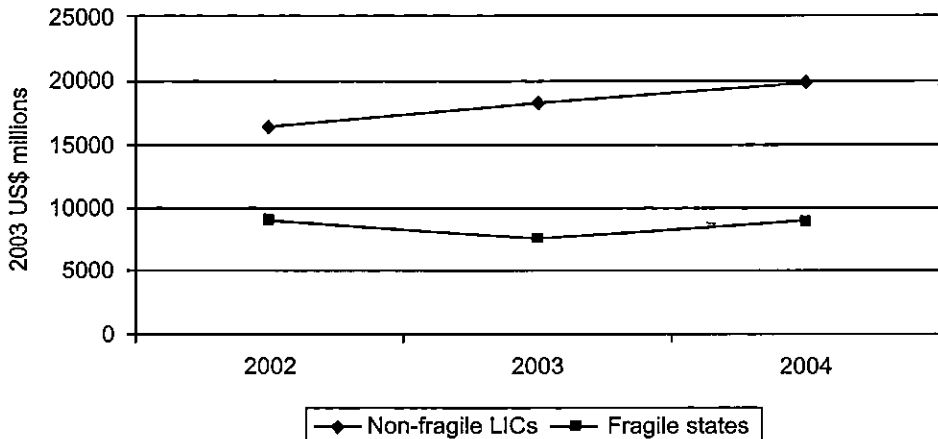
⁴⁴ Nicolas J. Wheeler, and Alex J. Bellamy, "Humanitarian Intervention in World Politics", in: John Baylis and Steve Smith, (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford: OUP, 2005.

UN charter commits states to protecting fundamental human rights and there is a right of humanitarian intervention in customary international law.

Humanitarian intervention poses the hardest test for an international society built on principles of sovereignty, non-intervention and non-use of force. In case of humanitarian intervention, great powers in the current world chose to intervene in one country, not to do that in other countries. There are more popular (also in media and politics) and more "forgotten" complex emergencies. Do states intervene for primarily humanitarian reasons? Realists contend that humanitarian intervention should not be legitimated as an exception to the principle of non-use of force because this will lead to abuse.⁴⁵ The problem of selectivity arises when an agreed moral principle is at stake in more than one situation, but national interest dictates a divergence of response.⁴⁶ There are disagreements regarding what principles should govern the right of humanitarian intervention.

In the light of the contradictions in humanitarian intervention and dilemmas with sovereignty and non-intervention, Ghani *et. al.* suggest that a new paradigm is required that would bring critical attention to bear on the issue of state sovereignty, and would integrate and unify existing international interventions in the states around the goal of closing the sovereignty gap.⁴⁷ Besides, when viewed as a disaggregated collection of distinct dimensions, the institution of sovereignty displays a remarkable degree of flexibility.⁴⁸

Figure 4. Aid to Low Income Countries Takes Off, Fragile States are Left Behind



Source: DAC News July 2006, <http://www.oecd.org>

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ They divide sovereignty as *de jure* and *de facto*. In their opinion, the gap between the two needs be reduced.

⁴⁸ Rudolph, *op. cit.*

Another idea is that non-forcible humanitarian intervention looks a better option for fragile states. It is defined in terms of activities of non-state actors and third party mediators in complex humanitarian emergencies, but it also needs to encompass global interventionist strategies designed to address the underlying causes of human suffering in world politics.

For long-term solutions, focus should be given on how to revitalize fragile states. In this context, it is necessary to go beyond the forcible humanitarian intervention and other short-term mechanisms. It is also necessary to look beyond aid system. However, it does not mean that aid is not necessary for fragile states. In fact, they need more foreign assistance. As Figure-4 shows, fragile states receive less aid than they should. Given their extreme poverty combined with governance indicators which are no worse than other low income countries receiving more aid. But these countries tend to be of less strategic importance and, hence, attract relatively little international attention. Many donors work on security sector reform, good governance, demilitarization, disarmament and reintegration. They also promote investment for reconstruction from official development assistance (ODA), military and private sources.⁴⁹ They also emphasize early warning system, effective aid delivery, and governance reforms.⁵⁰ The problem is that these measures are pathologically linked with aid which does not have better prospects in terms of sustainability and political stability. The real need of fragile states is to address both the symptoms and roots of their fragility.

6. CONCLUSION

Although there is a degree of doubt regarding whether states hold the monopoly of power within the politics of globalization, it continues to dominate the global order. Thinking in national terms is still very strong in the world. The preceding analysis clearly demonstrates that the donor-driven framework is too reductive and deterministic in its assumptions about fragile states. It is necessary to produce new and historically unique mixes of the national and the global domains in order to understand the phenomenon of fragile states. It has to be understood by multidimensional factors critically linked with the capacity of delivering collective goods.

The key issue is whether a state is able to exercise its domestic and international agentive powers. Changes are already seen in donors' view. In 2007, donors under the auspices of OECD signed a document known as *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations*.⁵¹ The preamble of this document notes that the long-term vision for international engagement in

⁴⁹ Speech by Jan Ruysenaars, Novib-Oxfam Netherlands (for the Reality of Aid Coalition) in the OECD-DAC Development Committee, Paris, 24 June 2005.

⁵⁰ DFID, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ OECD, April 2007, www.oecd.org/fragilestates accessed on May 3, 2008.

fragile states is to help national reformers to build effective, legitimate, and resilient state institutions, capable of engaging productively with their people to promote sustained development.⁵² While it is necessary to arrest the phenomenon of fragile states on the ground, the real focus must be on how to revitalize them. The long view is more important to tackle the problem of fragile states in the world. It is necessary to adopt a preventive strategy aimed at reconciling the task of nation-building with the human demands for social, political and economic rights. The emergence of Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea instead of Myanmar and the Philippines as the economic stars of Asia in the Post-War era highlights the importance of the building of credible national institutions as the instrument by which states can achieve the sustained economic development, political stability, social resilience and vibrant civil society. Finally, there is a need for more academic engagement on fragile states which would help further refining of our conceptual framework to understand various dimensions of fragile states.

⁵² *Ibid.*