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The New National Security Strategy: Focus on Failed States

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Among the most important elements of President Bush’s first National Security Strategy (NSS) is its focus on failed states. The president is wise to draw attention to the significant threats to our national security posed by failed and failing states. Such states can and often do serve as safe havens and staging grounds for terrorist organizations. Failed states create environments that spur wider regional conflicts with significant economic and security costs to neighboring states. They pose serious challenges to U.S. interests in terms of refugee flows, trafficking in illicit goods, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance, and lost trade and investment opportunities.

Despite the welcome emphasis in the NSS on the security threats posed by failing states, the Strategy does not offer any vision, policies, or new resources to counter these threats. A new U.S. strategy should combine improved intelligence collection with more aggressive efforts at conflict resolution and post-conflict “nation-building” in global crisis zones. Creating pockets of improved development and security would help limit the operating space of international outlaws. Thus, the United States should devise innovative ways to assist failed and failing states through targeted development and counterterrorism assistance as well as improved trade access to the U.S. market.



Failing states such as Afghanistan threaten U.S. national security and international stability. Here, a British Royal Marine points to ammunition discovered in an Afghan cave in May 2002.

NEW EMPHASIS ON FAILED STATES

From its first page, the National Security Strategy focuses attention on the dangers posed by failed states: “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.” In his letter intro-

ducing the NSS, President Bush elaborates: “The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into



terrorists and murderers. Yet, poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.”

President Bush is correct to focus on the problems posed by failed and failing states. The NSS also represents a new direction for this administration, which had not previously emphasized concerns about failed states in explications of the U.S. national interest. During his campaign, President Bush disparaged “nation-building.” In this new NSS, the Bush administration strikes a note of continuity with President Clinton’s last NSS (issued in December 1999), which identified failed states as among the threats to U.S. interests. President Bush has taken this concept a step further, stressing the direct threat such states pose to U.S. national security.

Failed states are countries in which the central government does not exert effective control over, nor is it able to deliver vital services to, significant parts of its own territory due to conflict, ineffective governance, or state collapse. Current examples include Afghanistan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan. Failing states—those in which the central government’s hold on power and/or territory is tenuous—also pose a serious threat. They are often countries emerging from, or on the brink of, conflict such as Angola, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Burundi, and Cote D’Ivoire. Others, like Colombia, have relatively strong central governments but are cause for concern, due to their lack of control over parts of their territory. Still others, including Pakistan, Georgia, Albania, Yemen, Nigeria, and Indonesia, are weak, if not yet clearly failing states.

At present, the preponderance of state failures is in Africa. While the problem is not exclusively African, the prevalence of failing states there suggests the need for Bush administration policies to help stabilize African states as a strategic interest of the United States, and to allocate resources accordingly.

THE THREAT POSED BY FAILED STATES

Why are failed and failing states significant threats to U.S. national security?

First, these states provide convenient operational bases and safe havens for international terrorists. Terrorist organizations take advantage of failing states’ porous borders, of their weak or nonexistent law enforcement and security services, and of their ineffective judicial institutions to move men, weapons and money around the globe. They smuggle out precious resources like diamonds and narcotics that help fund their operations. Terrorist organizations may also recruit foot soldiers from local populations, where poor and disillusioned youth often harbor religious or ethnic grievances.

Africa offers several cases in point. Sudan has served as a sanctuary and staging ground for al Qaeda and other global terrorist organizations. Its radical Islamist government is identified by the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism. Somalia, lacking any effective central government, has afforded safe operational space to affiliates of al Qaeda. Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations have hidden effectively in various African states (including Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Cote D’Ivoire, Mauritania, and elsewhere), where they planned, financed,



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trained for, and successfully executed terrorist operations against American and allied targets.

A second reason, not mentioned in the NSS, why failed states represent a threat to U.S. national security is that they often spawn wider regional conflicts, which can substantially weaken security and retard development in their sub-regions. The conflicts in Sierra Leone, Congo, and Sudan, each largely internal in nature, have also directly involved several other states. In some extreme cases, these conflicts have exacerbated conditions in neighboring countries, accelerating, though rarely precipitating, their failure. Examples include the impact of the Sierra Leone conflict on Guinea, and Congo's on Zimbabwe.

The costs of such conflicts to the United States are substantial. They include: refugee flows that can reach American shores; conventional weapons proliferation that exacerbates regional instability and strengthens international outlaws; billions spent on humanitarian and peacekeeping assistance; the opportunity costs of lost trade and investment; and the exportation by criminal elements of precious, portable resources including diamonds, narcotics, tanzanite, and coltan—a mineral found in Congo that is used in products such as cellular phones—that failing states often possess. Failing states can also harm U.S. national security and impact American society in other ways, notably through their occasionally active role in narcotics production and trafficking, as in Colombia and Afghanistan.

RIGHT FOCUS, INSUFFICIENT RESPONSE

Resource Flows

Much of what the administration offers the

developing world could, over the long term, help improve growth prospects in a number of countries, but not in failed and failing states. The much-heralded Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), if fully funded by Congress, would provide at least \$10 billion in new assistance to developing countries by 2006, and \$5 billion each year thereafter. However, it is available only to countries that "...govern justly, invest in their people, and encourage economic freedom," which clearly excludes weak or failed states.

The final criteria for MCA country eligibility are likely to be so stringent as to exclude other important states that are taking steps in the right direction but are not yet exemplary performers. This limitation reflects a contradiction in administration strategy, since it often looks to these same big countries to prevent or resolve conflicts in neighboring failing states and to serve as regional partners in the war on terrorism. According to the NSS, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, and Ethiopia are "anchors for regional engagement and require focused attention." Yet given the high bar being considered for MCA eligibility, most of these countries may not benefit from it.

Despite acknowledging their importance, the administration does not propose to direct new resources to failing states. Indeed, with a few important exceptions (e.g. in Colombia, parts of the former Yugoslavia, and now Afghanistan), most of these states, especially those in Africa, receive little from the United States except emergency humanitarian assistance. While there are many reasons to be cautious with expenditures in failing states, it is difficult,

"The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" was issued by President George W. Bush on September 20, 2002. This Strategy, the first by the Bush administration, is issued in accordance with the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, which mandated an annual report to Congress detailing the National Security Strategy of the United States. A copy of the Strategy is available at www.whitehouse.gov/nsc.

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if not impossible, to meet serious threats without additional resources.

Trade

The NSS devotes substantial attention to the benefits of trade for the world’s developing nations. However, the goals and tools for spurring economic growth outlined in the NSS do not apply to failing states. Trade promotion authority, offers to negotiate new free trade agreements with various parts of the developing world, and even the rather broadly available, nonreciprocal benefits of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) do not apply to failed states. Yet some failing states are currently positioned to export at least modest quantities of agricultural products, minerals, and even light manufactured goods to the United States.

Conflict Resolution

The administration’s approach to regional conflict resolution is notably cautious, suggesting a reluctance to lead efforts at regional conflict resolution, or to engage in peacemaking where the conflicting parties are not clearly ready for peace. If this posture were adhered to consistently, it would all but rule out concerted U.S. efforts at conflict resolution in failing states, few of which currently demonstrate sufficient will to end the conflicts that plague them.

In fact, the administration has been only selectively reluctant to engage. It has worked assiduously to avert wider conflict between India and Pakistan. In Africa, by contrast, the administration’s efforts have been more mixed. The NSS devotes several paragraphs to challenges of conflict resolution in Africa and notes that

“together with our European allies, we must help strengthen Africa’s fragile states.....”

Yet the administration has largely limited its active diplomacy in Africa to efforts to end the long war in Sudan, devoting little attention to Somalia, Liberia, or the urgent cases of Burundi and Cote D’Ivoire.

Nation-building

If the United States is to deal decisively with failed states and to succeed at post-conflict rehabilitation, it must engage in nation-building. The Bush administration remains ambivalent on the issue. In April 2002, President Bush invoked George Marshall’s vision as he spoke of the need for extensive U.S. efforts to “give the Afghan people the means to achieve their own aspirations.” However, the NSS itself is silent on the subject of nation-building.

As a practical matter, the United States has been comparatively generous in helping meet Afghanistan’s emergency requirements. But it will need to increase its assistance—with the help of other donors—and sustain it over the long term. Equally important is the need to bring greater security to the country. The Bush administration’s decision to devote more U.S. military forces to helping stabilize and reconstruct areas outside of Kabul should improve security and thus conditions for development.

Other post-conflict challenges, such as Haiti, Angola, and Sierra Leone, seem to have fallen almost entirely off Washington’s radar screen. In each case, however, important nation-building tasks—ranging from re-integration and re-

training of ex-combatants to institution-building—remain to be accomplished.

Counterterrorism Assistance

The administration seemingly has few plans to provide much counterterrorism assistance to failing countries. The NSS states that: “Where governments find the fight against terrorism beyond their capabilities, we will match their willpower and their resources with whatever help we and our allies can provide.” In practice, the United States has made only a few commitments to back this broad pledge in failing states. Colombia is among them, as a recipient of the generous Plan Colombia program and greater military assistance. Afghanistan also now receives significant security support from the United States.

In Africa, the Bush administration has stated its intent to provide selected countries, such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, with increased counterterrorism assistance. Yet, with the exception of Somalia, for which the administration requested \$1.2 million in counterterrorism assistance in its Fiscal Year 2003 budget (down from \$1.4 in FY 2001), those failing African states that are most incapable of policing their borders and tracking resource flows—Congo, Sierra Leone, Angola—are not slated to receive such U.S. support.

TOWARD A NEW APPROACH

To address effectively the threats to U.S. national security spawned by failed and failing states, the United States needs to move beyond rhetorical acknowledgement of the problem toward a more strategic approach characterized both by preventive action and innovative responses to state failures in progress. Many traditional devel-

opment tools require adaptation, and specific attention should be paid to limiting the potential for failed states to serve as havens for, or resource-suppliers to, terrorist organizations.

The specific programs crafted should take into account the particular circumstances of the recipient country, and some countries will merit more resources than others. Nevertheless, there are common, initial elements of an invigorated U.S. approach to failed and failing states that should be incorporated into a broad strategic framework, and linked to the extent possible to the efforts of such multilateral organizations as the UN, World Bank, and African Union.

Improve Intelligence Collection

First, the United States must understand better the specific risks inherent in each failing state. In this regard, we are severely under-resourced. With the exceptions of Afghanistan, Bosnia, Pakistan, and Colombia, where U.S. forces are deployed, U.S. intelligence collection and analytical resources devoted to failing states remain woefully inadequate. In Africa, intelligence collection has steadily diminished since the end of the cold war. The loss is particularly severe in the realm of human intelligence following the closure of a number of CIA stations. While collection increased somewhat after the U.S. Embassy bombings in 1998 and, again, presumably, after September 11, 2001, there is little evidence of sustained efforts to improve intelligence collection and analysis in most parts of Africa. As the administration obtains additional funding for intelligence activities in the context of the war on terrorism, it should direct the

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intelligence community to elevate the importance of, and resources dedicated to, collection and analysis in Africa and in other areas prone to state failure. Collection ought to focus particularly on transnational security threats, such as terrorism, smuggling of precious minerals, weapons proliferation (both conventional and weapons of mass destruction), crime, narcotics flows, and disease.

Take Risks for Peace

To deal seriously with failed and failing states, the administration must overcome its reluctance to prevent conflicts and attempt to broker peace, even where peace is elusive. There are no guarantees of success in conflict resolution, but there is also little prestige to be lost in failing, where credible effort has been exerted. On the contrary, where a threat is identified, and little effort is made to address it, there is far more ground for faulting the policy and its makers.

The administration should engage early and aggressively across the board when conflict is imminent or persistent—in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. The United States should continue its active efforts to defuse tensions between India and Pakistan and to resolve the conflicts in Colombia and Sudan. However, it should also immediately resume energetic involvement in the conflict in Burundi, which lapsed after the Clinton administration left office. There, the risk of mass killing is increasing, and the United States could face the consequences of its recent diplomatic neglect. At the same time, the United States should provide logistical and financial support to buttress the UN peacekeeping mission as well as disarmament and demobilization requirements in the Congo. In West Africa,

the administration needs to recognize the significant risks posed by political fragility in Nigeria and bolster the flawed but democratic government through such tools as debt relief, rather than by keeping it at arm's length.

Finally, the complex and difficult situation in Somalia now merits increased attention from Washington. Somalia's warring factions recently signed what may be a promising peace agreement. If the agreement holds, the United States should pledge economic assistance to Somalia and join with the European Union to provide logistical support to regional states, should they deploy peacekeepers to monitor the cessation of hostilities.

Help Failed States Regenerate

Where tenuous peace agreements offer the potential to revive weak or failing states, the United States, working with others in the international community, should be prepared to make sustained and large-scale commitments to post-conflict reconstruction, including nation-building. Despite negative perceptions of nation-building, there are several cases where strong U.S. or UN leadership has yielded largely positive, if far from perfect results. Examples of relative success include Mozambique, East Timor, Kosovo, Cambodia, and Lebanon.

Effective nation-building requires substantial investments in: disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and resettlement of ex-combatants; skills training and food for work programs; and, building transparent, accountable government institutions, particularly in law enforcement, the judiciary, the legislature, and economic

ministries. U.S. and other resources are also required to strengthen civil societies, foster press freedom, and professionalize militaries. Without sustained U.S. commitment to see nation-building through to its eventual conclusion, one cannot expect lasting progress in reducing the number of, and dangers posed by, failed states.

However costly and long-term, these investments are essential to securing fragile peace. The donors' bill for Afghanistan alone is estimated to be \$10 billion over the next five years. The cost of dealing effectively with the post-conflict challenges of Sierra Leone and Angola, and possibly with those of Congo, Somalia, and Sudan, could range from perhaps \$3 billion to \$15 billion over the same period, depending on how many of these conflicts reach lasting resolution. The U.S. share of the total cost could be approximately 25 percent (our traditional share of international financial obligations), or between \$750 million and \$3.75 billion over five years. Such funds would require an additional appropriation in the Foreign Operations Account separate from the proposed Millennium Challenge Account.

Nevertheless, the successful rehabilitation of these failed states would pay considerable security dividends to the United States. At the same time, the United States would likely reap longer term economic benefits in the form of reduced humanitarian assistance and significantly increased trade and investment opportunities, especially in oil-producing Angola, Congo, and Sudan.

Provide Aid, Trade, and Debt Relief

Current development strategies leave little

place for significant, non-humanitarian expenditures in failing or failed states. There are rare exceptions in high-profile cases where the U.S. military is employed, as in Afghanistan and Bosnia. While the bulk of U.S. assistance should continue to be targeted to viable countries well positioned to benefit from development resources, new approaches are needed to help spur long-term recovery in failed states and to assist in the rehabilitation of weak states, especially those emerging from conflict. The resources for such programs should not be sought within the MCA but rather in the form of debt relief for countries emerging from conflict and enhanced country programs with flexible programming authorities, such as the Economic Support Fund (ESF). ESF funds are controlled by the State department, and disbursed by either State or the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Limited and well-targeted assistance could be usefully employed in parts of failed states, but rarely is. Helping to establish zones of relative security and economic opportunity within these states would make such areas less attractive to potential smugglers, criminals or terrorists. An augmented ESF account for countries in transition, funded at approximately \$200 million per year, could provide valuable seed monies for a range of high-impact investments in failed and failing states. Even as conflicts continue, the United States could invest such funds in micro-enterprise, education, sanitation, and health projects in the more stable parts of Somalia, Congo, and rebel-held Sudan.

Trade benefits should also be utilized to aid the rehabilitation of failing states. The

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United States has opened its markets to thirty-eight African countries under AGOA, but the eligibility criteria clearly are intended to reward satisfactory political and economic performers. Excluding failing states was logical, given the objectives of AGOA, but consideration should now be given to new ways to spur trade with failing African states as one of several means to assist in their long-term recovery. Special trade provisions could also be implemented for Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Colombia with the aim of improving stability through accelerated growth and development.

Build Counterterrorism Capacity

Currently, the bulk of U.S. counterterrorism assistance goes to relatively stable states that are already active partners in the war on terrorism. This makes good sense. The United States should aim to provide more generous counterterrorism assistance, especially to partners situated in tough neighborhoods.

At the same time, limited and carefully

directed additional resources could be provided to certain failing states that are presently unable to be effective partners in the war on terrorism, but whose territory is prone to exploitation by terrorist organizations. In selecting potential recipients, we must take account of their will to work with the United States, and not just of their weakness. For instance, it makes little sense to provide such assistance to the Government of Sudan until the United States determines it is no longer a state sponsor of terrorism, or to Liberia, with which the United States presently has a chilly bilateral relationship.

While human rights issues must be considered, Burundi and Cote D’Ivoire could benefit from U.S. counterterrorism assistance. It would also be wise to assist the governments of Sierra Leone, Angola, and Congo to secure their borders and their diamonds from potential terrorist infiltrators and smugglers. The U.S. should also seek more active controls over uranium sources in Congo, Niger, and in other weak producer states. B

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