

# “PROBLEMS WITHOUT PASSPORTS” – INVESTIGATING FAILED STATES AS A GLOBAL TERRORIST THREAT

Albert Schoeman<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War not only brought about an end to the ideologically “loaded” and driven bipolar system, but also facilitated an optimistic period (with strong emphasis on economic and political freedom) which provided fertile ground in which globalisation could flourish. However, globalisation seemed to encourage “integration” amongst a minority of mainly developed states, whilst a majority of developing states became “fragmented” and marginalised in the process. As a result of this, ethnic, religious, economic and political tensions that seemed to be “contained” during the Cold War, resurfaced again. These tensions re-emphasised focus on what has recently been termed “new security threats”. Picciotto *et al.* (2005:12) describe the latter as “problems without passports”, highlighting the fact that these issues (including amongst others drug trafficking, refugee problems and specifically terrorism and state failure as the focus of the study), can no longer be contained within the borders of states but have become serious global concerns.

Until the September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States of America (US), attention regarding the study of failed states mostly focussed on the domestic and regional impact of this phenomenon - as something geographically far removed from the strategic interests of the “West”. However, the September 11 attacks have given the study of failed states a stronger international dimension and significance, emphasising the possibility that failed states might provide “safe havens” to terrorist groups. It is assumed that by using advanced communication technology (associated with globalisation) and operating in the absence of functioning state institutions, terrorists can use failed states as ideal platforms from which to plan their attacks. The September 11 attacks, therefore, profoundly affected and influenced American foreign policy. In its *National Security Strategy* the Bush Administration made it clear that the United States is under attack from terrorist groups that operate from failed states. An attempt will, therefore, be made to determine whether failed states actually pose a real global terrorist threat or whether it is just an opinion held by the Americans in view of their “war on terror”. The article will argue that the US is, in

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Political Science, UFS. E-mail: schoemanpa@qwa.ac.za

fact, overestimating the potential threat of failed states as terrorist havens. Instead, it will argue that failed states pose a much more serious domestic and regional threat where most of the political and economic devastation took place and where millions more people lost their lives compared to those who perished in international terrorist attacks. The article will further contend that US policy makers are using a generalised definition of failed states without acknowledging different levels of deterioration as well as political, cultural and economic differences amongst states that are categorised as failed. In this regard the failed state classification model can be a helpful tool in determining the probabilities and abilities of states to provide sanctuary to terrorist groups, provided that it is applied correctly. In other words, that the model is not applied in the undifferentiated way in which failed states are often observed in the American approach. Although the “assumed” connection between failed states and terrorism is of importance to the African continent (with reference to the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania), and is acknowledged, the study will - due to space constraints - not focus on the topic from a solely African perspective. Nevertheless, the generic approach of the study could add value to a better understanding of the terrorism-failed state nexus in an African context.

The article will commence with a conceptual overview of the body of literature that is often referred to as the “failed state thesis” and which has had a profound influence on American perceptions of terrorism. Attention will be given to how this study field defines the state, the criteria for statehood they identify, the conceptual dilemmas that confront them in their attempts to explain state failure and how they classify different degrees of failure. Criticism against the views of the failed state thesis will also be briefly addressed. Thereafter, attention will be focussed on how the September 11 attacks have shifted the significance of failed states as potential threats from a regional to a global level. In the next section, emphasis will be placed on views supporting the idea that failed states possess the ability to provide safe havens to terrorist groups. This will be followed by a counter argument, or in other words, the idea that most failed states are so vulnerable that they just do not have the capacity and capabilities to harbour terrorist groups.

## **2. WEAK, FLAWED OR FRAGILE – THE CONCEPTUAL DILEMMA OF THE FAILED STATE THESIS**

According to Hill (2005:144-145), the failed state thesis refers to an explanation about socio-political crises as well as the body of literature in which this argument is developed and promoted. In short, “(t)he principle aims of the literature therefore, are to investigate and explain why state failure occurs; to outline and highlight ways of identifying failed states; to identify states that are failed or are in danger of “failing”; to describe the processes of failure; and to consider how state failure can be either

Schoeman • “Problems without passports” — investigating failed states as a global terrorist threat prevented or reversed” (Hill 2005:145). In their attempts to determine why states are supposedly failing, this body of literature made use of a Westphalian/Weberian definition of the state against which the conditions in supposedly failed states are measured. Speiser and Handy (2005:8) argue that in the era of globalisation the debate about the nature, size, scope and functions of the state has experienced a renaissance. This, despite the fact that a number of globalisation theorists argued that the state has become redundant and will eventually be replaced by other forms of organisation.

Williams (2007:2) argues that the idea of statehood which dominates discussion about state failure originated in Europe and is associated with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The latter is regarded within mainstream international relations theory as the birth of modern interstate relations. According to Von Glahn (1970:90), the formal requirements for statehood were finalised in 1933 with the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. For an entity to be regarded as a state it had to have a defined territory, a permanent population, an operating and effective government as well as independence from outside control. Within the spirit of the Westphalian tradition, the state is defined by Max Weber (1990:38) as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”.

Under the influence of, and elaborating on, this Weberian definition, Joel Migdal (1988:19) then defines what he calls a “strong state” (also interpreted as an ideal-type state within this body of literature) as “an organization composed of various agencies led and coordinated by the state’s leadership (executive authority) that has the ability or authority to make and implement the binding rules for all the people as well as the parameters of rule making for other social organizations in a given territory, using force if necessary to have its way”. Migdal defines the capabilities a state should possess and then compares Third World states to that definition.<sup>2</sup> The usefulness of this definition is emphasised by Evans (1997:62-87) who argues that after a decade of renewed academic discussion, scholars have now widely agreed on a number of minimum functions with which all states have to comply. These minimum functions or requirements for statehood firstly include the state’s monopoly over violence or its ability to exert control and authority over its territory. In other words, the state uses its military and police force to settle local conflicts, to disarm possible violent actors within its jurisdiction and to protect its borders from possible attacks or illegal aliens. Secondly, it is also expected of the state to deliver other public goods in a variety of social sectors. These services include health, education, infrastructure, social services, an efficient labour market

---

<sup>2</sup> For Migdal (1988:19) a state’s capabilities would include the capacity to penetrate society, regulate social relations, the ability to extract resources as well as the use and effective distribution of these resources. In his view strong states possess high capabilities to complete these tasks while weak states are placed on the low end of the spectrum of capabilities.

and a healthy environment, amongst many other things. The third requirement for statehood deals with forms of political participation, decision-making procedures and the stability of political institutions. Furthermore it is related to the quality of public administration and the state's ability to uphold the "Rule of Law" (Speiser and Handy 2005:10–11).

A state's inability to comply with some or all of the requirements for successful statehood (and therefore the requirements of an ideal-type state) will determine the degrees of deterioration it experiences. The "weak" capabilities of states are a key characteristic in many of the definitions of failed states. According to Zartman (1995:5), the latter are states that can no longer perform the functions that are required from them to be regarded as states. Jackson (2000:296) adds that failed states are unable or refuse to safeguard minimal civil conditions for their citizens such as domestic peace, law and order and good governance. According to Williams (2007:1-2), states fail when its institutions are unable to control actors and processes within a given territory. In other words, the state loses physical control over its territory.<sup>3</sup> In terms of the second criterion failure is commonly used to highlight the way in which a state, either because of lack of capacity or a lack of political will, fails to provide public goods to the entire population instead of just a segment of it. States that experience failure (depending on the levels of deterioration) are often also characterised by internal conflict, displacement of the population, economic collapse and environmental degradation. Adherents to the failed state thesis have further emphasised the need for states to possess "positive sovereignty" as the determining criterion of their success. Jackson (1990:29) describes a positively sovereign government as "one which not only enjoys rights of non-intervention and other international immunities but also possesses the wherewithal to provide political goods for its citizens. It is also a government that can collaborate with other governments in defence alliances and similar international arrangements and reciprocate in international commerce and finance."

The main criticism from especially the "Post-Colonial" literature has been that the failed state thesis uses a state-centric and Euro-centric approach. Boas and Jennings (2005:387) argue that the terms failing and failed "are simply the most recent in a long list of modifiers that have been used to describe or attempt to explain why states residing outside of the geographical core of Western Europe and North America do not function as 'we' think they are supposed to". It uses a Weberian definition of the state and applies it to mostly former colonial states (that are branded as failed) in which the conditions and circumstances were totally different to those in Europe and the West. The successes and failures of states are simplistically reduced to an empirically observable capacity to manipulate coercive resources resulting

<sup>3</sup> Such a failed state might still have control over parts of its territory such as the capital city but is unable to exert its authority over other parts.

in an anti-democratic overtone of control and subordination (Bilgin and Morton 2002:62-63). When a state is thus described as failed the latter can be viewed as a “normative judgement” that is only meaningful if compared with something else, in this case the existence of a Westernised “healthy” state that has little relevance to most of the states in question because it has never existed there. In this regard Raeymaekers (2005:3) argues that state failure is often regarded as some “end state” – the result of having some terminal disease if compared with a healthy Western state rather than observing it as a process. To many observers a failed state might actually just be in a stage of state building. It is further accused of measuring state failure just in terms of its institutional (dis)abilities without considering the dynamics of civil society. Societies are often able to sustain themselves despite complete government failure.

The failed state thesis has also been criticised on other grounds. Raeymaekers (2005:3), for instance, argues that the current academic analysis of state failure and collapse suffers from a number of considerable weaknesses. Over the years a number of analytical models were proposed within the existing categories of analysis (in terms of the findings of the State Failure Task Force Report) but they did not succeed in distinguishing state collapse from general political crisis. Other commentators such as Doornbos (2000:97-815) and Milliken and Krause (2002:753-774) further suggested that the literature on state failure and collapse suffers from a number of dangerous flaws. Not only is it littered with obscure definitions but the causes and consequences of the concept tend to be blurred. The flaws and obscurities have become painfully apparent in recent failed state thesis vocabulary where descriptions such as “quasi”, “weak”, “failed”, “failing”, “flawed”, “fragile” and “collapsed” have been used by different observers as if their meanings are exactly the same. Words such as weak and failed are for instance used interchangeably to describe conditions in states that might actually be collapsing. Hill (2005:46) adds that “precisely what the differences are between quasi, weak, collapsed and failed states remains unclear and represents an important ambiguity within the failed state thesis”.

In order to overcome this conceptual confusion, academics and observers such as Geldenhuys (1999), Rotberg (2002) and Gros (1996) developed classification models in which the degrees of deterioration in these states are measured against conditions in an ideal-type state (especially referring to Weber and Migdal’s definitions of the state). This approach gauges degrees of stateness along a continuum starting with those states that meet classical Weberian criteria of statehood and ending with those that meet none of these criteria of successful statehood. The closer a state comes to fulfilling the ideals of statehood the closer its position will be to the ideal-type state indicating that it experiences a lesser degree of failure. States that have a limited or no capacity to fulfil the requirements of statehood are placed further away from the ideal-type state indicating higher degrees of deterioration.

In spite of slight differences most of the classification models distinguish between three broad categories of failed states namely weak, failed and collapsed states. Weak states are described by Rotberg (2003:4) as “inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; basically strong, but temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism or external attacks; and a mixture of the two”. Despite the internal problems, government institutions are still able to provide relatively effective protection and public goods. However, this situation changes dramatically when a state is classified as failed which Rotberg (2002:85) describes as “tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions”. Government institutions lose control over parts of its territory and can therefore no longer provide protection and public goods to its whole population. Collapsed states are described as the worst manifestation of state failure. According to Zartman (1995:1), collapsed states refer to a situation where “the structure, authority (legitimate power), law and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new”. Dispensations like these are characterised by a total collapse of government institutions as well as law and order amidst the associated confusion of erupting violence. The failed state classification models have, however, not been excluded from criticism.

In their contribution Bilgin and Morton (2002:66) accuse the failed state classification model for being a remnant of the Cold War strategic paradigm, meaning that current world affairs are still viewed through a theoretical lens that might have been relevant 20 years ago but not any more. The same applies to the failed state classifications or even taxonomies that have recently been developed within the failed state literature. Terms such as failed or rogue states are merely the latest in a series of representations of post-colonial states that have arisen in and beyond the context of the Cold War. The failed state thesis has played a significant role in the American perception of failed states as a global terrorist threat. Where it was once a study field rather far removed from American foreign policy focussing mostly on its regional and domestic consequences in developing states (Herbst 1996/97:120-144; Jackson and Rosberg 1982:1-24; Miliken and Krause 2002:753-774; Wolff 2007:1-20), the September 11 attacks gave it international significance (Krasner and Pascual 2005:153-163; Wise 2004:1-24; Record 2002:4 -23).

### **3. STATE FAILURE AND TERRORISM - FROM A REGIONAL TO A GLOBAL PHENOMENON**

In the period following the Cold War the study of failed states were mainly limited to the local (domestic) or regional level. In many academic circles state failure was observed as an anomalous characteristic of mostly post-colonial states – a problem

geographically far removed from the West. Especially in Africa, these states were often regarded as nothing more than moral catastrophes (Williams 2007:1). Theorists were mainly concerned with the often tragic humanitarian consequences of state failure that included refugee problems, displacement of people, human rights violations and genocide. Sur (2006:1) argues that the term failed state has a quite recent usage with its popularity dating back to around the time of the appalling massacres that took place in the Great Lakes region of Africa and particularly Rwanda. Wolff (2007:2) adds that during this time the issue of failed states was not primarily seen in terms of posing a risk to international security but as an unfortunate regional phenomenon that had either temporary significance or was of a more endemic yet not particularly threatening nature (especially in Africa). The regional emphasis of the time is summarised by Stohl (2004:1) who argues that “such states often threaten their neighbors and regions, not as classical military enemies but rather as the source of instability”.

However, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks the failed state discourse suddenly moved to centre stage on the academic and policy agenda. Raeymaekers (2005:3) argues that the sudden change in how failed states were now perceived had two important implications. On the one hand, it was acknowledged that failed states had evolved from being a regional phenomenon to one almost reaching global proportions. On the other hand, the shift of focus also acquainted state failure with an important strategic dimension. Contrary to the view of the early 1990s (when the world seemed to be preoccupied with the humanitarian and regional consequences of state failure), the failed state phenomenon is now interpreted as a potential source of international instability. The view of state failure has, therefore, moved from a “strategic threat” to regional stability to a threat to the international system of states as such (Helman and Ratner 1993:3-20; Raeymakers 2005:3). A recent view that has become popular among thinkers such as Dorff (1996:17-31) and Rotberg (2002:85-96) is to describe failed states as dangerous breeding grounds for “instability, mass migration and murder”. In extreme cases such states could also be “reservoirs and exporters of terror”. The latter view played an important part in post-September 11 American foreign policy thinking when US forces intervened in Iraq and Afghanistan, both of which are regarded as extreme cases of state failure. In view of this, Patrick (2006:27) argues that it has become a common claim that the gravest dangers to US and world security are no longer military threats from rival great powers but transnational ones coming from the world’s most poorly governed countries. These countries are linked to humanitarian catastrophes, mass migration, environmental destruction, regional instability, global pandemics, international crimes, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and transnational terrorism. According to Porch (2004:1), the “one-sided” approach of the American argument regarding a link between terrorism and failed states becomes apparent when their

views are compared to current European perceptions about the war on terror. Whilst American policy makers are currently strongly influenced by the neo-conservative school of thought that is “impressed above all by America’s military strength (and) persuaded...that such strength, allied to American ideals, can overwhelm any foe”, Europeans are mostly influenced by the multilateralist school which “do[es] not think that the struggle against terrorism is a war, and are afraid to use military force”. Consultation and action through international institutions such as the United Nations are suggested as alternatives to military action.<sup>4</sup>

Before the September 11 attacks US policy makers observed states with sovereignty deficits through a humanitarian lens and the issue of failed states received low priority in terms of the security risk it presented (Patrick 2006:27). In fact, the Bush Administration indicated that it was more interested in issues surrounding nuclear weapons and missile shields and their impact on relations with Russia, China and Europe and further stated that it would adopt a more “hands-off” approach towards problems and crises in the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. Bush also seemed to intentionally distance his administration from the more multilateral foreign policy approach that was taken by his predecessor, Bill Clinton. This became clear when the United States refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol and their further disinterest in all things multilateral, gaining the country a reputation as arrogant and unilateralist amongst friends and foes (Stohl 2004:2). The audacity with which Al Qaeda orchestrated the September 11 attack, presumably from Afghanistan, convinced President George W Bush and his administration that the United States was no longer threatened by conquering states but by failing ones. These sentiments were further emphasised when US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared that “nations incapable of exercising ‘responsible sovereignty’ have a ‘spillover effect’ in the form of terrorism, weapons proliferation, and other dangers” (Garfinkle 2005:47-50). For a brief period after the attacks, the Bush Administration seemed to embrace multilateral support and was able to sustain a form of multilateralism with US predominance, but by the end of the Afghan War (which commenced on 7 October 2001) and the preparations for their invasion of Iraq (20 March 2003) they had again adopted a unilateral stance (Stohl 2004:4).

#### 4. FAILED STATES AS “HOTBEDS” OF TERRORISM

The term failed state was popularised (even commercialised!) for the first time in the *New National Security Strategy* (NSS), a foreign policy document released in 2002 by the US government in reaction to the September 11 terrorist attacks. At first the concept failed state was not that familiar to John the Citizen, its use being limited

<sup>4</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the current philosophical divide between the US and Europe in terms of foreign policy thinking see the work *Paradise and power* by Robert Kagan (2003).



mainly to observers and academics who studied its regional consequences in Africa and Eastern Europe (Herbst 1996/97:120-144; Jackson and Rosberg 1982:1-24; Miliken and Krause 2002:753-774; Wolff 2007:1-20). However, in the aftermath of the September 11 attack the US government, especially, identified failed states as a serious national security threat, linking it to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, criminal networks and terrorism (Wise 2004:7; Takeyh and Gvodsev 2003:96).

The term failed state (as the preferred term used in the NSS) was, however, explained in fairly generalised terms without making any distinctions between “target” states in terms of degrees of deterioration or political, cultural and economic differences between them. The weak, failing and collapsed distinctions made by the failed state classification models (as discussed earlier) were therefore ignored. According to Rice (2003:2), the NSS particularly focussed on the threat that failed states posed in terms of providing safe havens for terrorist organisations. In view of the latter the NSS further contends that “failed states create environments that spur wider regional conflict with significant economic and security costs to neighboring states. They pose serious challenges to US interests in terms of refugee flows, trafficking in illicit goods, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance, and lost trade and investment opportunities”. As a result a vast number of newspaper and academic articles were published encouraging the belief that failed states had become a very serious national (American) and global threat (Wise 2004:14-15).

The argument goes as follows: Failed states are currently a major concern for analysts and policy makers for three reasons. Firstly, because of the chaos and lawlessness that exist in these societies terrorist organisations can conduct their activities without fear of capture or punishment. Government institutions in such states are just too weak, corrupted and distracted to find and eliminate terrorist groups from within their borders. In the second place, failed states often provide terrorist groups with access to all the necessary resources they need to conduct their activities, including money and recruits. These states provide ideal safe havens for criminal activities such as drug-trafficking and diamond smuggling that terrorist groups often use to finance their activities. In the third place failed states provide terrorist groups with the protection of their sovereignty. Because terrorists take refuge within the borders of a state that is in principle regarded as sovereign, they avoid capture by other states that might be reluctant to cross international borders to capture them (Dunlap 2007:3; Takeyh and Gvodsev 2003:7-8).

The prospect of failed states harbouring terrorism is further highlighted by Patrick (2006:34) who focusses attention on research that was done by the University of Maryland. Using data on global terrorist attacks the research shows that from 1991 to 2001, most individual terrorists came from low-income authoritarian countries in conflict such as Sudan, Algeria and Afghanistan. Similar research

conducted by the State Department reveals that for the period between 2003 and 2005 most US designated foreign terrorist organisations used weak and failing states as their primary bases of operation. The research claims that “(w)eak 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 operation, and pools of recruits”. Sudan and Afghanistan are used as examples of states that provided Al Qaeda with hospitality to build training camps and enlist recruits. On their part, Kenya and Yemen were exploited to launch attacks on US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (7 August 1998) as well as on the warship USS Cole (12 October 2000). These terrorist organisations financed their operations through illegal trade in gemstones, including diamonds and tanzanite, from African conflict zones (Patrick 2006:34).

Patrick (2006:34) and Mair (2003:108) further contend that Africa has emerged as a primary arena of concern amongst American policy makers. A September 11 Commission Report by the Congressional Research Service states that the international terrorist threat against the United States is likely to increase in several parts of Africa because of, amongst others, porous borders, almost non-existent security, political instability, as well as lack of state resources and capacities. An African variant of terrorism could become a possibility if problems such as the lack of economic perspective, social deprivation, a loss of cultural identity, political repression and dysfunctional states (characteristic of many sub-Saharan states) are exploited by agitators to direct the violence that is bred internally by these factors. According to Mills (2004:162), the former Clinton administration assistant secretary of state for Africa, Susan Rice, testified before the US congress in November 2001 that Africa must be regarded as the world’s soft underbelly of global terrorism. In response the Department of Defence have already started the training of African security forces in the Sahel region to control their borders and territories. Through the implementation of its *Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, the US have also committed itself to diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit by strengthening state capacities, alleviating poverty and promoting the principles of good governance (Radu 2007:1; Rodgers 2008:1).

Rice (2006:4-8) is of the opinion that although the failed state phenomenon is not new, the danger they pose is unparalleled. She stresses that “absent responsible state authority, threats that would and should be contained within a country’s borders can now melt into the world and wreak havoc”. Weak and failed states are usually poor and they lack the capacity to fulfil essential government functions. A state’s capacity to perform these functions is usually eroded by poverty. The latter tends to fuel conflict and sap human capital, by impeding the development of effective state institutions and creating an ideal environment in which political corruption can

flourish. The failure that many of these states experience are also a consequence of other capacity deficits such as lack of political legitimacy, lack of competence in economic governance and the inability to provide essential services to the population as well as a lack of security. These capacity gaps tend to further exacerbate poverty.

When instability and conflict erupt in failed states they create the optimal anarchic environment in which transnational “predators” can operate. Rice (2006:4-8), however, adds that failed states need not necessarily collapse into conflict or failure before they pose considerable risks to their own citizens, and also specifically to American citizens. The biggest danger is that failed states can serve as passive incubators for terrorists, criminal enterprises and deadly infectious diseases. Because failed states lack the capacity to effectively control and protect its borders they often house “ungoverned spaces” or remote areas that can provide safe havens and training grounds for terrorists and criminal networks. Because government services are often inadequate, voids in education and health are created that may be filled by radical elements within mosques, non-governmental organisations and madrassas. Governments in these states also struggle to establish and manage a basic health infrastructure with an effective disease surveillance capacity. Their inability or limited capacity to detect, contain and treat disease outbreaks can lead to the uncontrolled regional and global spread of these diseases.

## **5. STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: QUESTIONING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FAILED STATES AND TERRORISM**

Despite its seemingly dominant position in world affairs, the (mostly American) perspective that failed states provide terrorist havens has been challenged by a body of literature that include, *inter alia*, the contributions of Patrick (2006), Mills (2004), Von Hippel (2002), Laqueur (2003) and Logan and Preble (2006). The author concurs with Patrick (2006:34-35), who argues that the connection between state weakness and transnational terrorism is more complicated and tenuous than often assumed. Firstly, not all weak or failed states are characterised or afflicted by terrorism. In the 49 countries that have recently been categorised by the United Nations as the least developed hardly any terrorist activity occurs. The lack or absence of state capacity (often regarded as a key characteristic of state failure) *per se* is unable to explain why terrorist activity is concentrated in specific regions, particularly the Middle East and broader Muslim world instead of other regions such as Central Africa. Other variables and dynamics (which include political, religious, cultural and geographical factors) that shape the global distribution of terrorism are not always considered by adherents of the failed state literature. Most states that have presented threats so far are Islamic and limited to regions such as the Middle-East, North Africa and to a lesser degree South-East Asia. Terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda (that originate from

these regions) live and plan their activities from Western states, not failed states. This can be regarded as a negative characteristic of globalisation. Terrorists make use of the very same technology that drives globalisation to plan and orchestrate their sinister activities (Patrick 2006:34-35; Laqueur 2003:11).

Secondly, not all acts of terrorism that occur in weak and failing states are transnational. This is illustrated by the fact that much of these terrorist acts are self-contained actions by insurgents motivated by local political grievances or national liberation struggles. An example of such an insurgent group is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. Governments in failed states are often too busy "terrorising" their own populations for them to be able to present any other external threats. These acts of terrorism are, therefore, only partly related to the "global war on terrorism" which focusses on terrorism with a "global" reach (Patrick 2006:34; Mills 2004:157-169)<sup>5</sup>.

Thirdly, in terms of the degrees of failure that they experience, not all weak and failing states are equal. Adherents to the failed state thesis are fond of arguing that terrorists are attracted to collapsed, lawless polities such as Somalia or Liberia. On the contrary, terrorists are often more likely to use weak but functioning states such as Pakistan or Kenya as their organisational bases. Such states are usually badly governed, fragile and susceptible to corruption, providing easy access to the global economy, communication technology, transportation, and banking services. Africa's weak states might be more likely to provide sanctuary and stopover points to terrorists than collapsed states.<sup>6</sup> Conditions of conflict and poverty within the borders of failed states can create a breeding ground for alienation and radicalisation, thereby providing potential recruits for terrorist groups (Patrick 2006:35; Mills 2004:161-162).

Africa has a Muslim population of around 250 million, comprising 40 percent of the continent's population. Some of the major terrorist threats in Africa came from areas where African states adjoin Arabian states. In spite of this the United States remains concerned about states with large Muslim populations such as Nigeria, Tanzania and the Ivory Coast. Although it has been severely criticised (but in the absence of any better alternatives), the use of the failed state classification model

<sup>5</sup> Hubschle (2006:16) argues that, in view of the contested nature of terrorism as a concept, "the closest to a universally accepted definition is perhaps contained in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 54/110 of 9 December 1999, stating that terrorism comprises criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes". The "war on terror" is a slogan that was announced by the Bush Administration after September 11 to suggest an extensive and global struggle to combat and defeat international terrorism (Cox 2005:155).

<sup>6</sup> Although weak states already experience a number of internal political and socio-economic problems, their institutions are still able to function relatively effectively. Such weak central government authorities would therefore be able to provide a route for bypassing international banking systems and financial scrutiny. The absence of local authorities makes it easier for external actors to use African territories as safe havens (Mills 2004:161-162).

can, therefore, be a very helpful tool in determining the probabilities and abilities of states to provide sanctuary to terrorist groups. The higher the degree of deterioration (in the case of state collapse) the less likely it would be for such a state to present a terrorist threat. States that experience a lesser degree of deterioration (weak states) are more likely to provide sanctuary to terrorists. In the case of failed states (so fondly used in American foreign policy) these dispensations are characterised by severe internal conflicts and governments that lose control over vast areas of its territory which makes its ability to harbour terrorists highly unlikely. Failed states indeed have the ability to harbour terrorists but, as statistics proved, very few states were actually guilty of this with the exception of Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan and possibly Pakistan. The levels of deterioration that states experience, therefore, have a significant influence on its likelihood to harbour terrorism (Mills 2004:162).

In the fourth place it is argued that transnational terrorist organisations are only partially (and even decreasingly) reliant on weak and failing states (Patrick 2006:35). Although weak and failing states can therefore provide useful assets to transnational terrorists, they are likely to be less central to terrorist operations than widely believed. Mills (2004:161) adds that there is no exact link between state weakness or failure and terrorist activity. On the contrary, it may be argued that for terrorists to operate effectively they would also require key governance and infrastructure attributes (such as regular air flights and reliable communication and banking systems). The lawless and violent nature of collapsed states makes them difficult and often unsuitable environments to operate in. The warlords in Somalia are probably more concerned about competing with other warlords than they are in collaborating with terrorists. Collapsed states are dangerous, especially for foreigners, are exposed to international counterterrorist action and are difficult settings in which to maintain neutrality and partisanship “and where outsiders can themselves become embroiled in local disputes and politics”.

Von Hippel (2002:31) agrees by arguing that the attractions offered by collapsed states may be countered by the difficulties facing terrorists when they have to operate in an insecure and foreign environment where security is itself fragmented and the infrastructure unreliable. It is therefore not clear whether collapsed states, or parts of states that are no longer controlled by the central government, are used as safe havens or training facilities. The connection between poverty and terrorism is also disputed – the terrorists that were involved in the September 11 attacks all came from the middle class and were well educated. The extreme levels of poverty experienced by most sub-Saharan African states would therefore not automatically make them more prone to house terrorists.

Furthermore, although failed states can definitely present threats, it is a mistake to argue that they frequently do (Logan and Preble 2006:1-6). It would be absurd to claim that state failure in, for instance, Haiti would present the same

kind of national security threat as the state failure in Indonesia, with a population of 240 million or even nuclear armed Pakistan. The vast majority of failed states in the world, especially those in Africa, present no security threat to the US. The blanket characterisation that failed states represent anything monolithic is, therefore, misleading. Failed states can, however, pose a threat as was proven by conditions in Afghanistan in the late 1990s, a state that met anyone's definition of a failed state. Amidst the chaos that characterised this state, Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network posed a serious security threat to the US because of the good relations that they had with the Taliban regime. Although Afghanistan under the Taliban was a failed state and posed a security threat it was actually quite a rarity.

Logan and Preble (2006:6) add another dimension to the critique. They ask whether "at times, the claims that failed states are inherently threatening seem so dubious that one wonders whether the arguments may not simply be a vehicle for generating support for foreign interventions". Some observers even go so far as to argue that the US is just arbitrarily linking acts of terrorism to a very generalised definition of failed states as an excuse to drive its "war on terror" – or the front for its imperial ambitions. The US government should instead of issuing categorical statements about who or what they perceive to be failed states, rather examine countries, failed or otherwise, on the basis of discrete measures of threat assessment to determine the intentions of governments and non-governmental organisations in terms of attacking the US. Afghanistan again serves as an example of the fact that failed states cannot be overlooked but does not justify moving failed states to the top of the list of security concerns. It is therefore argued that the US is committing Strategic Overkill (something similar to going on a duck hunt with an Abrams tank) by exaggerating the global terrorist threat posed by failed states. It relies on a generalised definition of state failure (often not even distinguishing between weak, failing or collapsed states) without making a thorough analysis of the unique political, cultural, religious and economic dynamics that exist in these states.

The most serious threat presented by failed states lie at the domestic and regional, rather than global, level. More lives have been lost in states that are ravaged by civil war, genocide, total economic and political collapse and the displacement of people than in any terrorist attacks that are linked to failed states. The spill-over effects of regional conflicts in terms of refugee problems and the spread of deadly diseases are of far greater concern. Citizens in failing and collapsed states are often more likely to come under attack from their own governments (state terrorism) than having the ability to house other transnational groups. Mills (2005:235-236) argues in this context that failure tends to create centrifugal negative ripple effects both domestically and regionally. At the domestic level failure has an impact on vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly. The regional impact of state failure manifests itself in terms of refugee flows and the decline in regional growth, trade

Schoeman • “Problems without passports” — investigating failed states as a global terrorist threat and investment. Baker and Ausink (1996:4-6) add that the demographic tension caused by refugee flows often leads to a regional crisis. Refugees cause a dramatic increase in population density; they tend to destroy the environment; they compete with local populations as a means of survival and spread diseases. Once a state’s government institutions start to deteriorate and its society has experienced civil war, the threat of further conflict increases. The humanitarian tragedy associated with state failure is often a direct result of government institutions’ inability to protect its citizens and their property. In weak or failing states government institutions are barely able to control their capital cities, not to mention the rural areas. It is therefore logical that chaos, anarchy and lawlessness would be at the order of the day in an environment where the government no longer has the ability to protect its citizens through an effective military and police force (Gros 1996:463-464).

If cases of state collapse were regarded as breeding grounds for terrorism, numerous parts of the African continent (such as the Congo) would be on such a list. Apart from Sudan and Somalia, the only other states that have had alleged links with Al Qaeda are Sierra Leone and Angola (Von Hippel 2002:33). However, the latter states were involved because of the illegal diamond trade and not because they provided safe havens to these terrorists. The economic dimension should, therefore, be of greater concern to the counterterrorism coalition than the “breeding ground” issue. Natural resources such as diamonds, timber and oil are exploited without regard to domestic sustainability and are used to finance wars and illegal activity. In this regard, most failed states (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) are rather indirectly involved in terrorism (through illegal trading) than in presenting a direct global terrorist threat.

## **6. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the connection between terrorism and failed states has become high priority within mainstream international relations and security studies discourse. In the period after the end of the Cold War the debate focussed exclusively on the humanitarian consequences of state failure on domestic and regional levels. However, September 11 dramatically altered this view and alternatively emphasised that failed states actually presented a global security threat, as these states possessed the ability to act as safe havens from which terrorist networks could orchestrate attacks. The study attempted to investigate whether failed states actually presented a global terrorist threat or whether it is a perception created by the US to justify their own war on terror.

The study commenced with a brief conceptual overview of the failed state thesis. The latter can be described as a body of literature that attempted to determine why states fail by measuring conditions in these states against the characteristics

of an ideal-type state. (The latter refers especially to Max Weber and Joel Migdal's definitions of the state which encompass the ideal requirements of statehood.) The failed state thesis has also created classification models to distinguish between levels of deterioration and to prevent conceptual confusion. Distinctions have been made between weak, failed and collapsed states – a state's position depending on the levels of deterioration it experiences in comparison to the "ideal-type" state. This was followed by an historic overview of the way in which the September 11 attacks shifted the influence of failed state studies from a regional to a global security emphasis. The study attempted to briefly explain how the traditional "hands off" foreign policy approach of the US changed to one that was more unilateral. In the next section the emphasis shifted to the views that support the idea that failed states have become a serious global security threat. These views were, to a large extent, driven by the US government in their foreign policy document, the *National Security Strategy*, first published in 2002. This document made it clear that failed states presented a global terrorist threat because of, amongst many other factors, the fact that they provided ideal conditions (chaos, lawlessness and disorder) for terrorists to function in. These views encouraged the publication of many academic and other papers supporting these sentiments.

However, in this article it was argued that failed states in general present a very limited international security threat. Instead, it was argued that the levels of deterioration in states will probably influence their likelihood to harbour terrorism. A weak state would for instance be more likely to accommodate terrorists than a collapsed state. Conditions of chaos and lawlessness would probably be just as unsuitable for terrorists as they would be for normal travellers. Also, instances where terrorist attacks were orchestrated from weak or failing states were few and far between. In the era of globalisation terrorist networks can plan their attacks just as effectively from within Western states. This article thus criticises the Bush Administration for using a generalised definition of failed states (as a direct threat to US national interest) and arbitrarily applying it to states that might not even have the ability to present global threats. The USA have been reluctant to make a proper analysis of possible target states in terms of levels of deterioration or political, cultural, religious and economic conditions in these states.

Instead of presenting any serious global terrorist threats, failed states are responsible for humanitarian devastation on domestic and regional level. More people lost their lives in civil wars than those that were killed by international acts of terrorism. The consequences of state failure in terms of poverty, displacement of people, famine, refugee flows and economic collapse are therefore of greater concern than the few instances where these states were directly involved in the orchestration of terrorist attacks against "Western targets". The only acts of terrorism citizens of failed states often experience is when they are harassed by what is left of



Schoeman • “Problems without passports” — investigating failed states as a global terrorist threat their governments or other fighting factions. However, through the illegal trade in diamonds and small arms, failed states are often indirectly involved in terrorism, as the money generated through these transactions often funds the activities of terrorist networks.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baker PH and Ausink JA 1996. *State collapse and ethnic violence: Towards a predictive model*. <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/96spring/baker.htm>.

Bilgin P and Morton AD 2002. “Historicising representations of ‘failed states’: Beyond the Cold-War annexation of the Social Sciences?” *Third World Quarterly* 23 (1):55-80.

Boas M and Jennings KM 2005. “Insecurity and development: The rhetoric of the ‘failed state’.” *The European Journal of Development Research* 17 (5):385-395.

Cox M 2005. “From the Cold War to the War on Terror.” In Baylis, J and Smith, S (eds). *The globalization of world politics: An introduction to world politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 131-157.

Doornbos M 2002. “State collapse and fresh starts: Some critical reflections.” *Development and Change* 33(5):797-815.

Dorff RH 1996. *Democratization and failed states: The challenge of ungovernability*. <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/96summer/dorff.htm>.

Dunlap BN 2007. *State failure and the use of force in the age of global terror*. [http://www.bc.edu/schools/law//lawreviews/metaelements/journals/bcicl/27\\_2/09\\_TXT.htm](http://www.bc.edu/schools/law//lawreviews/metaelements/journals/bcicl/27_2/09_TXT.htm).

Evans P 1997. “The eclipse of the state? Reflections on stateness in an era of globalization.” *World Politics* 50:62-87.

Garfinkle A 2005. “A conversation with Condoleezza Rice.” *American Interest* 1(1):47-50.

Geldenhuis D 1999. “Staatsverval.” *Politeia* 18(2):37-54.

Gros JG 1996. “Towards a taxonomy of failed states in the new world order: Decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Hiati.” *Third World Quarterly* 17(3):455-471.

Herbst J 1996/1997. “Responding to state failure in Africa.” *International Security* 21(3):120-144.

- Hill J 2005. "Beyond the other? A postcolonial critique of the failed state thesis." *African Identities* 3(2):139-154.
- Hubschle A 2006. "The T-word: Conceptualising terrorism." *African Security Review* 15(3):2-18.
- Jackson RH 1990. *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, international relations and the Third World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson RH 2000. *The global covenant: Human conduct in a world of states*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jackson RH and Rosberg CG 1982. "Why Africa's weak states persist: The empirical and juridical in statehood." *World Politics* 35(1):1-24.
- Kagan R 2003. *Paradise and power: America and Europe in the new world order*. London: Atlantic Books.
- Krasner SD and Pascual C 2005. "Addressing state failure." *Foreign Affairs* 84(4):153-163.
- Laqueur W 2003. *No end to war: Terrorism in the twenty-first century*. New York: Continuum.
- Logan J and Preble C 2006. "Failed states and flawed logic: The case against a standing nation-building office." *Policy Analysis* 560. Cato Institute.
- Mair S 2003. "Terrorism and Africa: On the danger of further attacks in sub-Saharan Africa." *African Security Review* 12 (1):107-110.
- Migdal JS 1988. *Strong societies and weak states: State society relations and state capabilities in the Third World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Milliken J and Krause K 2002. "State failure, state collapse, and reconstruction: concepts, lessons and strategies." *Development and Change* 33 (5):753-774.
- Mills G 2004. "Africa's new strategic significance." *The Washington Quarterly* 27(4):157-169.
- Mills G 2005. *The security intersection: The paradox of power in an age of terror*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Patrick S 2006. "Weak states and global threats: Fact or fiction?" *The Washington Quarterly* 29 (2):27-53.

- Schoeman • “Problems without passports” — investigating failed states as a global terrorist threat
- Picciotto R, Alao C, Ipke C, Kimani M and Slade R 2005. *Striking a new balance: donor policy coherence and development cooperation in difficult environments*. London: The International Policy Institute at Kings College, London and The Global Policy Project.
- Radu M 2007. *Western Sahara in the “International Community.”* <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=18082>.
- Raeymaekers T 2005. “Collapse or order? Questioning state collapse in Africa.” *HICN Working Paper* 10. Brighton: University of Sussex.
- Rice SE 2003. The New National Security Strategy: Focus on failed states. *Policy Brief* #116. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.
- Rice SE 2006. *Strengthening weak states: A 21<sup>st</sup> century imperative*. Paper presented at the Power and Superpower: Global Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conference: Center for American Progress and The Century Foundation.
- Rodgers P 2007. *The US and Africa: Eyes on the prize* <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=17372>.
- Rotberg RI 2002. “The new nature of nation-state failure.” *The Washington Quarterly* 25 (3):85-96.
- Rotberg RI (ed.) 2003. *State failure and state weakness in a time of terror*. Cambridge: World Peace Foundation.
- Speiser D and Handy PS 2005. “The state, its failure and external intervention in Africa.” *Working Paper* 175/05. Stohl R 2004. *The failed and failing state and the Bush Administration*. <http://www.cdi.org/friendlyversion/printversion.cfm?documentID=2769>.
- Sur S 2005. *On “failed states”*. <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/0502-SUR-GB.pdf>.
- Takeyh R and Gvodsev N 2003. “Do terrorist networks need a home?” In Lennon ATJ (ed.). *The battle for hearts and minds: Using soft power to undermine terrorist networks*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, p. 96.
- Von Glahn G 1970. *Law among nations. An introduction to public international law*. London: The Macmillan Company.
- Von Hippel K 2002. “The roots of terrorism: Probing the myths.” *The Political Quarterly* 73 (1):25-39.

Weber M 1990. "What is the state?" In Macridis RC and Brown BE (eds). *Comparative politics. Notes and readings*. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, pp. 38-41.

Williams PD 2007. "State failure in Africa: Causes, consequences and responses." *Africa South of the Sahara (Europe World Yearbook)*. Routledge.

Wise WM 2004. *American perspectives on the threat posed by weak and failing Asian states*. Paper presented at the U.S.-China Conference on Areas of Instability and Emerging Threats.

Wolff S 2007. *State failure in a regional context*. <http://staff.bath.ac.uk/mlssaw/working-papers/state-failure.pdf>.

Zartman IW 1995. "Introduction: Posing the problem of state collapse." In Zartman IW (ed.). *Collapsed states. The disintegration and restoration of legitimate authority*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, pp. 1-11.