Identifying Causes of State failure: The Case of Somalia

Failed States in Sub-Saharan Africa

By

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I. Introduction

Various policy makers, national security statements and strategies point to “state failure” as a serious security problem. The words which have been used to describe the phenomenon of “Failed States” are ungoverned space, instability, insecurity, chaos, anarchy, terrorist, warlords and humanitarian problems. The reality of “Failed States” causes a challenge for conceptual frameworks, political norms and social structure and rebuilding of the amorphous term and idea. Failed states are hard to categorize, as numerous studies and debates have highlighted the problem of state weakness, failure and collapse. These are all terms used to explain variances in the state system. “Failed states” are seen as a problematic in themselves but also as drivers of other security threats, such as regional instability and chaos. One country in particular, Somalia, can be considered a failure among failed states for the length and durability of its failed state status. Somalia is a country that has been in a state of collapse since 1991 with the complete disintegration of the central government. The political rhetoric and images of insecurity associated with the term “Failed States” are often images of violence and complete anarchy. Images from the movie Black Hawk Down and the everyday chaos reported in Somalia, the casebook example of a “Failed State”, are the first associations of the “Failed States” for American Foreign Policy makers.¹ Lawlessness and crime rule in failed states where governments, judiciary, and laws once operated and reigned.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the discussion on failed states, fragile states or weak states and the essential causes of state failure and applying the theoretical framework to the case of Somalia (What is Somalia? A Failed state? The sum of an

¹(Bowden 1999)
ancient-clan system? There are several challenges to the use of the case study of Somalia, as few researchers have been to the state and information can be random due violence and other security issues and concerns.

2. Constructing a Definition

The term “failed states” is a quite new systematic term used to explain a state, but the tenure and its definition and theory may not reflect political reality. The definitions of “Failed States” are amorphous in academia and public policy, presenting a contested issue for scholars, researchers and political actors. The conceptualization of “Failed States” is essential to understand why the highly securitized construction of failed states represents a budge in assessing and understanding transnational security threats. According to Robert I. Rotberg (2004) “Nation-states fail when they are consumed by internal violence and cease delivering positive political goods to their inhabitants. Their governments lose credibility, and the continuing nature of the particular nation-state itself becomes questionable and illegitimate in the hearts and minds of its citizens” (2004: 1).

3. The Causes of State Failure

The discussion about the failed states phenomenon entered policy and political rhetoric in the early and mid-1990s to describe the post-Cold War world (Helman and Ratner 1993:3-20; Lymon and Princeton 1993: 96-110). In particular, the conventional International Relations theory of “Failed States” is not an analytically useful tool for fully comprehending the drive of state failure. The dynamic causes and effects of state failure and policy responses have been limited to neorealist and neoliberal thoughts which have resulted in mixed policy responses.
The common elements of the failure are the following: the existence of internal war and insurgency; ethnic, religious; the state cannot use a direct control over the whole territory and the borders; the provision of public goods, like health care or education is declining; weak central institutions, the lack of democracy; the military oppression is the only tool in the hand of the executive branch; collapsed infrastructure; corruption; the hole between the rich and the poor is growing drastically. (Rotberg 2002: 85-89; Krasner 2004: 85-86; de Mesquita 2005: 515; Dorff 2005; Ignatieff 2003: 302-303; Sung 2004: 125; Zartman 1995: 5) The word “failed state” refers the condition where the organization, authority, law, and political order have fallen separately and the government lost the personality performing in the name of the people, its control over territory, its legitimacy, and the competence to produce regular commodities (Bilgin 2002: 56).

The short introduction categorizes common causes and indicators leading to state failure hopes to highlight the complexity behind this terminology. The variety of indicators used to determine state failure can vary from the simple to the complex. The Brookings Index ranks the 141 developing countries, as part of the World Bank classifies as low-income, lower middle-income, and upper middle-income. Specifically, the Index relies on four “baskets,” each of which contains five indicators.\(^2\) Each of the four baskets consists of indicators that are proxies from one core aspect of state function: the 4 economic, social, political and security baskets for state vulnerability range from “Stable economic environment” to “Occurrence and intensity of violent conflict or its residual effect (e.g., population displacement).” The variety of indicators to identify a weak,

failing, failed and collapsed state illustrates the depth of the challenge of defining state failure.

All states are not the same in competence and political will. The variety of states in the international system demonstrates the difference between strong, weak, collapsed and failed states. These labels are not compatible as they represent different levels of states in the international political system. According to Bilgin and Morton (2002), “[T]he notion of a ‘failed’ state, for instance, is used to describe the internal characteristics of a state, whereas ‘rogue’ states are labeled as such because of their foreign policy behaviors” (2002: 5). Thus, a variety of terms refer to field of troubled states in the international state system.

According to Rotberg (2004), states are the “building blocks of world order” (2004: 1) and the concept of state failure is troubling to conceptualize. Throughout human history, nations, regimes and empires have risen and fallen. Nation-states are the normative framework in international relations theory and are the political reality that governs people, law, and security. Nation-States are the political actors that are ascribed with specific rules and expectations associated with sovereignty, but not all states have the political will or capacity to fulfill their state obligations, political goods or sovereignty expectations (Rotberg 2004).

On the other hand, Jackson (1996), introduced the concept of “quasi-states” to show up the global political systems reliance on such a unit of analysis and paradigm. Jackson was concerned with weak states that did not accomplish the traditional concept of state sovereignty. Jackson (1996) argues that, “[T]he problem is that underdeveloped states claim both security rights and development rights and the international community
desires to acknowledge both claims but classical rules of sovereign states-systems get in the way” (Jackson 1996: 44). Therefore, a failed state is a component of the international system but the political certainty is noticeably different from theoretical certainty.

State performance based on deliverance of political goods is crucial to understanding the difference between failing, failed, and collapsed states. States and state performance should be conceptualized as a continuum of government effectiveness described as strong states, weak states, failing states, failed states, and collapsed states. Strong states and weak states have key differences. According to Rotberg (2004: 2-4), strong states outperform weak states in performance of political will by delivering political goods.³

On the other hand, strong states provide security within their borders to their citizens. In comparison, weak states do not provide such levels of political will. The defining characteristics of weak states, articulated by Rotberg (2004), are:

Weak states (broadly states in crisis) include a broad range of states: they may be inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; or they may be basically strong, but temporarily or situation ally weak because of internal antagonisms, management imperfections, hunger, repression, or external attacks. Weak states typically haven ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other tensions that have not yet, or not yet thoroughly, become overtly violent . . . In weak states, the ability to provide

³ Political goods defined by Rotberg as:
“‘There is a hierarchy of political goods. None is as critical as the supply of security, especially human security . . . The state’s prime function is to provide that political good of security—to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their differences with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion. The deliver of a range of other desirable political goods becomes possible when a reasonable measure of security has been sustained.”
adequate amounts of other political goods is diminished or is diminishing . . . Weak states usually honor rule of law precepts in the breach. They harass civi society. Weak states are often rules by despots, elected or not (Rotberg 2004: 3-5).

Furthermore, all weak states do not necessarily slip into failing, failed or collapsed categories. The threshold between state weaknesses transforming into state failure has additional indicators tipping a state into failure. There are significant differences between a failed and a collapsed state. “Failed States” do not remain fixed in their status or history and can show more than one failed state characteristic at once (Gros 2000:461).

Particularly, detailed indicators identify failed states. According to Christopher (1997), the dissolution of central and local administrations is the leading cause to state failure (Christopher 1997:92). Moreover, “Failed States” may have regimes that target their own citizenry, encourages or is even the cause of conflicts, which results in escalating criminal violence within state borders. The legitimacy of the state is lost as the state institutions deteriorate or is completely destroyed; the economy weakens then collapses, key indicators to identifying state failure (Rotberg 2004: 6-9).

On the other hand, Rotberg (2004) argues that, the lack of political goods, explains a collapsed state (2004: 10-14). According to Zartman (2005) “State collapse is both the cause and the result of internal or civil wars, as weak and illegitimate order permits violence and violence consumes legitimacy and order. Although no two cases of state collapse are the same and “collapse” can take on a variety of specific manifestations, the fundamental fact of the disappearance of state institutions, law, and order creates inhumanities and insecurities that affect the surrounding countries”
Zartman focuses on state violence as the main impetus to cause state collapse.

In order to understand state failure, one must realize the structure that allows such states to exist. States are the units of power and sovereignty for a people. A state has a clear definition and function. Quasi-states, those states with “limited empirical statehood”, have been operating in an international system that allows them to operate without fulfilling the bare basics of positive sovereignty (Jackson 1996: 21). In the Westphalian system, all states are treated equal even though many states are stronger than others in delivering positive goods to their citizenry. Moreover, Raeymaekers argues that,

“...The discussion on state collapse thus seems to be placed in a growing deadlock between classical state-centrist approaches-which keep pointing at functional problems-and more society-oriented insights that try to explain other political and economic loyalties that have emerged in the context of weak state performance” (Raeymaekers 2005: 1).

All of these definitions and conceptions of the causes of state collapse illustrate the variety in approach and construction of state weakness, failure and collapse. The theoretical and policy execution focus on a complete rebuilding of the failed state institutions and legitimacy. In the case of Somalia, the terms are used to refer to an essential state failure, it exists on a map but the physical reality of security, sovereignty and a centralized government does not exist.

In this paper, I focus on Somalia, one of the clearest examples of state failure in Africa today. First, I will provide brief overview of state failure in Somalia. Second, I will examine a number of theoretical approaches. As an example, I am going to illustrate the empirical findings of Brooking Index in Somalia.
4. Somalia: The pathway to state failure

Somalia is the typical failed state. By any characterization, the Somali state is recognized as having failed in 1991. This is somewhat baffling, since Somalia is one of the most homogenous countries in Africa in terms of ethnicity (85 percent Somali), religion (99 percent Sunni Muslim), and language (85 percent Somali). The primary divisions in Somalia are along clan and sub clan lines. The main clan families in Somalia are Darod, Dir, Issaq, Hawiye, and Digil-Mirifle. Within these major clans are numerous sub clans. It is along these clan and sub clan identities that sub national tension or hostility occurs in Somalia (Clarke and Godsende 2003: 132).

Somalia gained independence on June 1, 1960 when British and Italian colonies were combined to form the Somali Republic. Independence on June 26, 1960 from British Somaliland and July 1, 1960 from Italian Somaliland when the two were united to form one united post-colonial rule country. After independence, the country had brief period of democratic governance. A national constitution was adopted by referendum in 1961 and a National Assembly created to represent the various clans/sub clans. In March 1969 the National Assembly elected Abdirashid Ali Shermarke as the president of the country. By October of the same year, president Shermarke was assassinated by one of his body guards and Major General Mohammed Siad Barre took control of the apparatus of government in a military coup (Zartman 2005: 77).

After the coup, General Barre took all executive and legislative power in the Supreme Revolutionary Council, which was chaired by him. General Barre then stopped the constitution and adopted a system of “scientific socialism,” which efficiently aligned the country with the Soviet Union (Powell et al. 2006: 3). Using “Scientific socialism,” Barre
nationalized access to land, water, banks, and other productive assets. Much of the nationalized assets were redistributed to General Barre’s own clan and supporters. This, coupled with the poor economic policies implemented by General Barre, hurt the Somalia economy so significantly that, by early 1990, the country was on the edge of collapse. By 1980s, various groups has risen to resist Barre’s rule, including the Somalia National Movement (whose membership was made up primarily by the Isaaq clan), the United Somali Congress (an instrument of the Hawiye clan), the Somali Patriotic Movement (Staffed mostly by Ogadenis), and the Somali Salvation Democratic Movement, which had been created by members of the Majerten clan (World Bank 2005: 10).

Barre was overthrown by rival clans in 1991 and the central government subsequently collapsed. Numerous factions tried to take control of the government but failed and what enhanced was a civil war. After this, the international community has attempted numerous interventions, including one leading by the United States in 1993. In addition, Ethiopia, Egypt, Yemen, Keya, and Italy have all tried to bring the various factions over the entire territory. None of these efforts has succeeded.

Barre’s violent regime accommodated to fuel mistrust among clans in Somalia. Finally, many clan groups decided that they could not trust central government but had to depend only on their own clan for security and economic and social development. Consequently, numerous clan-based warlords emerged to fight for control of the apparatus of government. Civil war soon enhanced, but none of the warlords was capable to take full control of the territory. The civil war in 1991 and 1992 ruined the country’s economic competence, killed about 250,000 people, brought about a shocking famine, and shaped a serious refugee problem (World Bank 2005: 11-13). In the absence of a functioning state,
numerous factions have laid claim to portions of the territory. Each faction has established its own “government” in the form of an organizational structure and each possesses substantial capacity to impart violence. Theses factions include the semi-autonomous governments of Somaliland Puntland; the TFG; Islamist militant groups such as Al-Shabab, Hizbul-Islam, Ahlu Sunna Wal-Jamaa; Islamic courts that control parts of the south-central Somalia; and recently, pirates whose sole interest is monetary gain (Kimenyi 2010: 2).

Situated in the northwest and northeast region of the country, Somaliland and Puntland stated their autonomy from Somalia in 1991 and 1998, respectively. Though they are not internationally recognized, these semi-autonomous states have been able to afford relative peace and strength within their borders. Both states approved a clan-based system of government and have attained some success in maintaining and order. Despite these improvements both Somaliland and Puntland face major economic problems. Much like the rest of Somalia, shortage, poverty and unemployment is widespread. Informal money transfers from livestock exports are the primary source of income in Somalia. The country’s informal money transfer system or *hawala* is one of the largest money transfer systems in Africa, used to finance various activities from daily household expense to the illegal operations of pirates. The lack of economic break has led some factions, mainly in Puntland, to focus in piracy. This low-cost, high-return industry has become one of the most beneficial industries in Somalia. While it is difficult to get an exact figure, it is anticipated that pirate activities in Somalia brought in over $50 million in 2008, making it the most productive industry in Somalia (Worth and McDonald 2008: 1).
In 2006, Ethiopian and TFG troops created Al-Shabab and Hizbul-Islam in the wake of the defeat of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). These groups continue to fight the TFG and each other for territorial control. Al-Shabab is rumored to have ties with Al-Qaeda, adding a global security element to state failure in Somalia (Kimenyi et al. 2010: 1352). However, with the rise of Al-Shabab and Hizbul-Islam, Ahlu Sunna was forced to pick up arms. In March 2009, Ahlu Sunna joined forces with the TFG to fight Al-Shabab and Hizbul-Islam, but by September 2010 the alliance had fallen apart. Ahlu Sunna argued that while it was making gains in its fight against Al-Shabab, the TFG was steadily losing territory and failing to protect the people (Ibrahim and Gettleman 2010: 1).

The large contribute of weapons in Somalia continues to stimulate fighting between the various factions. Small arms are prolific in Somalia that they are a form of currency in most parts of the country. Countless UN resolutions have failed to stop flow of weapons through Somalia’s leaky borders. Instead, Mogadishu has become a key arms center in east Africa with weapons flowing freely to and from Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, and the DRC (Kimenyi et al. 2010: 1343).

The drivers of state failure are often dynamic and vary from one state to another. These drivers include a mixture of external factors, structural and economic factors, political and institutional factors, and social factors. Indeed, state failure is a complex issue. Valligs and Moreno-Torress (2005: 11-13) argue that weak institutions are the major driver of state failure. Institutions permit the state to uphold the rule of law and handle the often conflicting interests of the collective effectively. When these institutions are weak, the state is vulnerable to failure. The constant changes in state institutions and inconsistent rules within fragile states ultimately lead to their failure when combined with
other factors. Ineffective and unaccountable institutions leave room for abuse of power by the executive, elites and nonstate actors alike.

Some researchers assert that in the case of Somalia and many other African states, states failed after the transition from colonies to independent states. The second wave of state failures in Africa happened in the 1980s and 1990s when countries were transitioning from single party or dictatorships in some cases to democracies. Goldstone et al. (2004: 438-40) argue that countries whose political systems are in the process of transition are at a much higher risk of state failure. Another external factor that is linked with state failure is regional instability. States do not manage in isolation; instability among neighbors can threaten the state (Vallings and Moreno-Torres 2005: 20). This is especially true in the case of most African states. In the coming section the paper will address some important points which is measured in Brooking Index.

5. Measuring State’s performance in Somalia

The Index of State Weakness in the Developing World ranks all 141 developing countries according to their relative performance, based on spheres of economic, political, security, and social welfare; it is based on rankings, ranging from 10 (highest) to 0 (lowest). This index is different from others, it focuses on all areas of state function, not just on certain specific topics, such as conflict (failed states Index), governance (World Bank’s Governance Matters indicators), or development (UNDP’s Human Development Index).

**Economic Factor (Basket):** assesses a state’s ability to provide its citizens with a stable economic environment, sustainable and equitable growth; they take into account recent economic policies, growth, and private sector development.
**Political Factor (Basket):** assesses the quality of stat’s political institutions and the extent to which its citizens accepts their system of governance as legitimate; measures government accountability, the rule of law, the extent of corruption, democratization, freedom of expression and association, and the ability of state bureaucracy and institutions to function effectively, independently and responsively.

**Security factor (Basket):** Evaluates whether a state is able to provide citizens physical security, measures the occurrence and intensity of violent conflict, illegal seizure of political power, perceptions of political instability, territory affected by conflict, and state-sponsored political violence and gross human rights abuses.

**Social Welfare factor (Basket):** Measures how well a state meets the basic human needs of citizens, including nutrition, health, education, and access to clean water and sanitation.
Table 1: Description of the 20 Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECONOMIC</th>
<th>POLITICAL</th>
<th>SECURITY</th>
<th>SOCIAL WELFARE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note: For each indicator, the researchers sought to use the latest data available. Most of the data sources used were published in 2007, and most of the data were for the years indicated above. For more detailed information on data sources and the aggregation process see the “Technical Annex” (page 29).


A basket score of 0.00 represents the worst score; a score of 10.00 signifies the best.

Table 2: Description of Somalia’s weakness.

Index of State Weakness in the Developing World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Political</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Social Welfare</th>
<th>GNI Per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: available at: http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2009/02Weak_states_index.aspx
Somalia (# 1), perhaps the world’s most emblematic failed state, has been without a functional central government, and its capacity to provide key public goods to its citizens has collapsed. Somalia’s civil war destroyed the state judiciary, leaving an institutional vacuum that was subsequently filled by the Islamic Courts Union. Ethiopian-backed interim government, installed in 2007, lacks legitimacy and is failing to fulfill any critical functions of state. Somalia’s health care and education systems remain shambles, as reflected in the country’s rock bottom social welfare score.

Somalia lacks the ability to effectively control substantial portions of its territory. The government is unable and/or unwilling to provide for the essential human needs of its citizens—in terms of security as well as adequate food, clean water, health care, and education. Its abysmal overall scores reflect the vicious cycle of collapsed security environments that result in (and may sometimes be fueled by) poverty, decaying political institutions, bankrupt economies, and miserable social conditions.
6. Conclusion

The factors of state failure are often different from one state to another. These factors include a combination of external/international aspects, and social, structural and economic factors, political and institutional factors. Indeed, state failure is a complex issue. Some researchers argue that weak institutions are the key drivers of state failure. Institutions let the state to maintain the rule of law and manage the often conflicting interests of the collective effectively. When these institutions are weak, the state is vulnerable to failure and collapse.

On the other hand, in the African context, the legacy of colonization has proved to be the main driver of state failure. This has been found to be true in other regions of the world too. The manner in which these state are formed—whether the state is the result of gradual evolution or the fake product of the decolonization process-matters critically for the potency of the state.

My finding in this paper is that violent conflict is both a symptom and a driver of state failure. States become more fragile as a result of violent conflict; particularly, violent conflict is more likely to occur in fragile states. The enduring nature of conflict is one of the most common characteristics of failed states. Heterogeneity in the ethnic, religious, and clan composition of the state has been found to contribute to state fragility (Rotberg 2003: 5). Social cohesion among groups in a state is necessary for creating effective political institutions. The state’s ability to provide political goods is diminished by tension between groups.

Furthermore, economic factors such as extreme poverty, low income, and overall economic decline have also been cited as indicators of state failure. Not all poor states are
fragile states. However, every failed or failing state in the world today is a low income
country. The incapacity of the state to carry economic well-being for the majority of its
citizens over a prolonged period of time increases the likelihood of failure. Many
researchers have pointed to poor governance, environmental stress, militarization as
drivers of state failure. Furthermore, we have tested a combination of these drivers in the
case of Somalia in four different fields (Political, Security, Economic, and Social
welfare). Moreover, in the case of Somalia we have observed the state’s inability to
perform basic functions often results in poor economic performance, rising
unemployment, and decreasing real household income. Corruption is extensive in
Somalia; furthermore, government’s control does not extend beyond the capital city.

The impact of state failure on citizens can be quite diverse. State failure can create
very lucrative economic opportunities for national elites; it can impose significant
economic and social costs on the rest of the people (Rotberg 2004: 8). In fact, state failure
often forces a brutal deterioration of the living standards of many citizens, as the case in
Africa’s failed states including Somalia.


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