



Failed States: Realities, Risks, and Responses

Brennan Kraxberger

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The issue of state failure is both overly sensationalized and under-appreciated in popular discourse. In the West, failed states are too readily associated with terrorist activities. Likewise, publications such as the Failed States Index greatly exaggerate the number of countries with extreme political dysfunction. Too often, huge swathes of the developing world – notably Africa – are perceived as failed. Even so, collapse of effective governance in a minority of states is a pressing problem in Africa, parts of Asia, and elsewhere. In another kind of misperception, policy makers and citizens alike often wrongly assume that fixes for state failure are necessarily expensive.

This short book seeks to re-energize policy discussions and improve public understanding of the world's most troubled places. When governments do not or cannot provide basic public goods and services such as physical security, courts, and infrastructure, the effects extend well beyond threats of piracy or terrorism emanating from states like Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Failed states, or even critically weak states, can export various types of misery and threats to their neighbors and beyond. Dismal economic performance, refugees and displaced persons, illicit smuggling, and health challenges are some of the key negative impacts.

Drawing on a longer historical view of statehood, this work provides a synthesis of recent calls to revamp the global community's approach to fragile states. The book recognizes the fact that some countries gaining formal independence in the last century have never had much state building success. And it questions the wisdom of only utilizing status quo methods for (re-) constructing functioning states. The book argues for the re-evaluation of statehood, the United Nations sovereignty framework, and the overwhelming bias toward preserving existing territories. Readers will be delighted to see that novel responses to state decay could be less costly than the status quo.

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