Fragile States
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Violence and the Failure of Intervention

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For our grandchildren:
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As was their purpose, the workshops brought together a rather disparate group of scholars representing very different intellectual traditions and approaches. Most of the workshop participants participated in three or more of the five meetings. They included Chadwick F. Alger, Mohammed Ayoob, William Bain, Christopher Clapham, Robert Dorff, Peter Grabosky, Ted Robert Gurr, Robert Jackson, Jennifer Jackson-Preece, Leslie Janzen, George Lopez, Ann Mason, Steven Metz, Michael Nicholson, Alpa Patel, Scott Reid, Dan Smith, Hans-Joachim Spanger, Rachel Stohl and Peter Wallensteen.

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Introduction

War and Conflict in Today’s World

Something has happened when it comes to war and conflict in today’s world. It is not that violent conflict has disappeared; there is plenty of it, and some conflicts are even more destructive and devastating in terms of human cost than previously. But we commonly think about large-scale violent conflict – that is, war – as something that takes place between two or more countries. The very definition of war in Webster’s Dictionary reflects this view; war is simply defined as ‘a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations’.

It is this kind of thinking about war which is increasingly obsolete. In the first half of the twentieth century, conflict escalated into two world wars. Since then, the number of interstate wars has been in decline. This trend has continued after the end of the Cold War. Since 1989, there have been a total of 128 armed conflicts – most of them minor, 48 of them wars (defined as armed conflict in which at least 1,000 people are killed, or killed yearly). Only eight of these conflicts were interstate; the rest of them were intrastate (Harbom and Wallensteen, 2009).

We have therefore experienced a fundamental shift in the nature of armed conflict, including war. Such conflict is now much more intrastate than it is interstate. However, in some cases these intrastate conflicts were internationalized in the sense that an external state or group of states intervened in the conflict, as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,
where several neighbouring states supported one side or the other. In the case of the Georgia war of 2008, a Russian force supported the Ossetians against Georgia. In 1999, NATO intervened in the Serbian war in Kosovo, and in 2011, it intervened in the uprising in Libya. Still, these conflicts are primarily intrastate, related to the peculiar characteristics of the countries affected by violence. These countries are widely defined as fragile states. State fragility is not automatically accompanied by a breakdown of order and collective violence. New research rather shows that the absence of a consolidated state may be compensated by various other ways of governance (Hagmann and Péclard, 2010: 542). Nevertheless, where there is large-scale, intrastate violence there tends to be state fragility. For that reason, it is necessary to engage in the analysis of fragile states in order to understand what it is that generates and shapes war and conflict today, the theme of the book series of which this volume is a part.

This book offers such an inquiry. In concrete terms, the book will clarify the concept of ‘fragile state’ and discuss it in relation to other popular concepts such as ‘weak’ and ‘failed’ states; explain how fragile states emerge in terms of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history; set forth the core characteristics of fragile statehood as a Weberian ideal type, but also address the differences between countries owing to dissimilar trajectories; analyse the connection between fragile statehood and violent conflict with special reference to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and Haiti; analyse the role of international society in relation to fragile statehood and explain – again with special reference to the three cases – why the role of outsiders in addressing the problems is necessarily limited; identify a few successes – that is, countries which ‘ought to be’ fragile, but which are not, owing to particular circumstances; and offer a (pessimistic) view of the future of most fragile states.
The Decreasing Importance of Interstate War

Some commentators believe that the decline in interstate wars will be reversed. They claim that ‘the world has become normal again’, in the sense that ‘nations remain as strong as ever, and so too the nationalist ambitions, the passions, and the competition among nations that have shaped history’ (Kagan, 2007: 1). From this view, the rise of non-democratic powers like China and Russia will pave the way for aggressive power balancing and potential violent conflict.

But there are strong arguments for diagnosing a more permanent transformation of interstate relations. First, there are a number of consolidated liberal democracies in the international system; they have created a very high level of economic, political and social integration among themselves. In the context of the EU, the development of supranational authority and free movement across borders set a new framework where countries may continue to be formally independent, but at the same time are deeply integrated in a cross-border community. In such a framework, the use of organized violence to solve conflicts is no longer an option; the countries which waged two world wars have within a few decades become a security community (Adler and Barnett, 1998; Deutsch et al., 1957).

The forces of political and economic integration are relevant elsewhere also, and that further reduces the risk of interstate war. The newly emerging powers – such as Brazil, China, India or South Africa – know that the road to success involves deep involvement in economic globalization; by no means does it call for territorial conquest. In this sense, these countries are following the ‘trading state’ path set by Japan and Germany after the Second World War (Rosecrance, 1986, 1999), even though they believe in having considerable military capabilities reinforcing their bid for voice on the global level. Secondly, new regional communities such as the African
Union (AU), the Union of South American States (UNASUR) and the Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have the potential to develop into security communities, though they may differ from the Western type referred to above. Thirdly, there is some hope that the normative basis of global cooperation may be strengthened by further democratization, although ‘the third wave’ of democratization identified by Samuel Huntington in many instances got stuck and resulted in ‘defect democracies’.

These changes have been accompanied by increasing respect for the ‘territorial integrity norm’ – that is, ‘the proscription that force should not be used to alter interstate boundaries’ (Zacher, 2001: 215). That norm emerged in the context of the League of Nations after the First World War. It was generally accepted as an element in the UN Charter in 1945 and it has been strengthened since the mid-1970s. Thus, from 1976 to the present, ‘no major cases of successful territorial aggrandizement have occurred’ (Zacher, 2001: 237). In short, classical war between states is either irrelevant (among consolidated liberal democracies) or in sharp decline (among emerging economies and other modernizing states). Our argument is not that interstate war will never take place again. In some regions, such as the Middle East or in Kashmir, there is a continuing risk of war between states. But large-scale violent conflict is now overwhelmingly intrastate, taking place in fragile states, though, as stated above, not all fragile states are equally conflict prone and the frequency of intrastate conflict varies as well.

**Fragile States: A Different Kind of Statehood**

We may feel that we have always lived in a world of sovereign states. However, the global system of sovereign states is actually quite recent and developed as a result of the pro-
cess of decolonization following the Second World War. The system of states has been greatly expanded since then, with the number of member states of the United Nations growing from 5 at its founding in 1945 to its current membership of 192. Western-style modern states, with polities based on law, order and centralized rule, developed economies and defined nations (i.e. groups of people which make up a legal, cultural and emotional community), developed to full maturity only in the twentieth century and in non-linear ways (see the emergence of Fascism and Stalinism). Human history, then, is not a history of sovereign statehood; far from it. During most of human history most people have resided in communities with overlapping loyalties or empires with contested borders. These communities lacked the major features which are usually associated with contemporary sovereign states. The study of international relations has tended to underline the similarities of states; that is, to treat states as ‘like units’. J. D. B. Miller expressed it in the following way: ‘Just as we know a camel or a chair when we see one, so we know a sovereign state. It is a political entity which is treated as a sovereign state by other sovereign states’ (Miller, 1981: 16). For many realist scholars of international relations, the sovereign state is a given point of departure and not a subject of investigation; focus is on the relations between states, not on their different qualities.

Economic liberals, in contrast, address the (internal) characteristics of states. But they, too, follow a uniform image of a functioning state in as much as they have tended to see weak and fragile statehood as a transitory stage of development which would be solved once Third World countries followed the same developmental path as taken earlier by the developed countries in the West: a progressive journey from a traditional, pre-industrial, agrarian, non-democratic society towards a modern, industrial, democratic mass-consumption society. But this evolutionary view is wrong; there is no