

Forging a US Strategy for Strengthening Fragile States

50th Strategy for Peace Conference
Sponsored by the Stanley Foundation
October 15-17, 2009
Airlie Center, Warrenton, Virginia

Pauline H. Baker, The Fund for Peace, Roundtable Chair
Jessica Rice, Rapporteur

Purpose

The aim of this roundtable is to stimulate in-depth discussion and practical policy recommendations on how the US can develop a holistic strategy for strengthening fragile states. Currently, the US approach to fragile states does not reflect the urgency and seriousness of the problem, which affects approximately one-third of the world's population and some 40 to 60 at-risk states (depending upon how one defines the issue). The 2002 National Security Strategy asserted that, in today's world, failing states are more of a threat to national security than conquering states. Yet the strategic importance of the issue is not sufficiently matched by our capacity to address it. There is no single office in the national security structure that is mandated to focus on the full breath of the problem and that carries sufficient authority to orchestrate a holistic, interagency approach – nothing comparable, for example, to the EPA to deal with environmental problems, the Threat Reduction Initiative to deal with nuclear proliferation, or Homeland Security to deal with natural and manmade disasters that threaten the nation. Instead, each agency takes its own approach to WFS, using its own framework, methodology, and tools. As a result, the USG has a fragmented “stovepipe” structure, in which different bureaus relate to the issue as a subset of their own agendas rather than an important subject area in its own right. Weak and failing states (WFS) are viewed as a subset within the developmental, military or diplomatic structures, and they are then typically divided into pre-conflict and post-conflict crises requiring different policies. This segmented approach does not grasp the challenges inherent in the full life cycle of internal conflicts, with the result that military has ended up with the principal responsibility for dealing with the problems of state building and stability operations.

It is time we recognized that WFS constitute a new class of conflict that needs new approaches, fresh thinking and high level attention. The goal of this roundtable is to recommend what must be done to achieve that objective. We want to get beyond the well-worn debates which simply argue over which bureau gets how much money, or whether a “czar” should be appointed for the issue. Rather, we want to identify the major political/intellectual hurdles blocking a serious and holistic approach and move forward with practical policy recommendations on how to integrate full life cycle challenges, incorporating pre-ongoing-and post-conflict capabilities. We want to develop a new narrative that widens the concept of “national security” to embrace the world of fragile, frail or failing states, many of which are getting worse across several social science indicators. The roundtable should identify 1) what new structural and conceptual approaches are needed to fully address this issue and 2) how the USG can use existing assets to assist weaker states in strengthening their internal capacities for greater competence, political legitimacy, and social inclusion that will lead to sustainable security.

Agenda

I. Thursday, Oct 15, 8:00 pm – 10 pm: Defining the Importance of the Problem

- A. Introduction of participants/Chatham House rules
- B. Review of agenda for rest of the conference
- C. Premises: existing structural, conceptual, operational capacities
- D. Is the US prepared to take a more strategic approach to the problem of fragile states? Will it be able to change both its internal approach and to take a leadership role in the world to this issue? How should the problem of state fragility rank in the hierarchy of national security concerns?

II. Friday, Oct. 16, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm: Scanning The Landscape: The Scope, Depth and Drivers of State Fragility

- A. Focus on Ken Menkhaus' paper
- B. Typology of Fragile States
- C. Patterns and analysis
 - 1. Reasons behind state failure
 - 2. Reactions of international community
 - 3. Conditions which impel interventions
 - 4. Lessons learned
 - 5. Hard cases –when should the international community stay away?
 - 6. Sleeper cases – how can we avoid strategic surprises?
 - 7. Frozen conflicts –should we thaw them out, leave them frozen in time, or move on?
 - 8. How does the US get beyond ad hoc, reactive approaches?
 - 9. How can the US shape events in a more preventive way?
 - 10. How can we link early warning to state building?

III. Friday, Oct. 16, 2:00 pm – 5:30 pm: Ingredients of State Building; Existing Strategies, Frameworks and Tool Kits

- A. What do we know about state building? Main lessons learned for international actors.
- B. What is missing?
 - 1. Defense
 - 2. Development
 - 3. Diplomacy
 - 4. Building local capacity
 - 5. Measuring progress: monitoring and assessment
 - 6. Preconditions for success
 - 7. Success models
 - 8. Failure models
- C. “Really hard state building”: How do we deal with conflicting goals, e.g.,

- 1.State building (SB) vs. counter-insurgency (COIN) and counter-terrorism: are long-term political goals comprised by short-term military expediencies, such as training local militias, allying with local warlords?
- 2.State building vs. democratization: Can elections, accountability, and insistence upon political inclusiveness threaten SB and COIN objectives? How do we reconcile them?
- 3.State building vs. development: How can economic development take place in an environment undergoing simultaneous challenges in SB, COIN, and democratization? Or in an economy dependent upon drug trafficking?
- 4.What should the USG do to resolve such conflicts? What takes priority? Is this a sequencing problem or a fundamental conflict?

IV. Saturday, Oct. 17, 9:00 am – 10:15 pm: The Way Forward: Forging a US Strategy

- A. Building upon the insights of the previous sessions, what steps should the USG take to reach the goals put forward at the beginning of the roundtable?
 1. Steps toward a more holistic conceptual approach?
 2. Steps toward a more integrated governmental approach?
 3. Should there be a more centralized and visible place in the USG to oversee the new strategy, such as the NSC?
 4. What role do NGOs have in this new strategy?
 5. How do we link up with our allies in long-range planning?
 6. With so much on the national agenda, including “war fatigue,” a huge deficit, and pressing domestic controversies, how does the administration explain the goals of this policy in a new public narrative?

V. Saturday, Oct. 17, 10:30 am – 12:00 noon: Wrap-Up Plenary Session of All Roundtables

- A. Summary of conclusions and recommendations