ESSAY

The idea of a fragile state: Emergence, conceptualization, and application in international political practice

Ryszard Ficek

Political Science, Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland

Abstract
This paper studies the concept of a 'fragile state,' its origins, uniqueness, and the circumstances determining the changing dynamics of the presented subject, as well as the possibility of its application in the practice of International Relations (IR). The analysis of the conceptualization process, as well as the instrumental treatment of the idea of state's fragility structures by decision-makers responsible for shaping foreign policy - especially in the context of the global development and security strategy - underlines the complexity and incoherence of the fragile state's concept, which is currently considered as one of the most 'wicked problems' of the modern world, often torn by numerous brutal military conflicts. The author of the piece uses the term 'fragile state' to describe not only the form and conditions of disintegration of the state's political and social ties and the dismantling of its state-legal infrastructure, but also analyzes issues related to the economic collapse, poverty, hunger, humanitarian disasters, armed conflicts, as well as numerous cases of elementary civil liberties and human rights violations. The article argues that deepening the comprehending of the fragile state's idea, along with emphasizing its conceptual vagueness and complexity, concerning the 'politically correct' discourse on the problems of 'fragility' and states' weakness, is necessary for a better awareness of the ambiguous and the perplexing nature of state power operating within the most politically unstable and insecure regions of the so-called 'Third World.'

Introduction

The collapse of the state as well as its stagnation, regression, or the fragility of political and administrative structures are now widely discussed terms that, in practice, refer to a similar phenomenon consisting of the inability of the state as a sovereign political entity to operate within its borders. In this sense, fragile and failing states display various types of deficits in implementing tasks attributable to the central administration of state power. These include, among others, the control of the monopoly on the legal use of violence, the enforcement of state law, fiscal policy, etc. Therefore, in the context of the fragility of the state, the traditionally used concepts of both capacity, aptitude, and competence of the state, as well as its legitimacy, must be appropriately verified and adapted to take into account the specificity of explicit countries struggling with the issue of state's fragility.

A large body of literature on the subject has appeared in political science since the early 1990s, but it has distinct focal points and blind spots. Particularly striking is the lack of systematic research into the causes of such failures by state institutions. On the one hand, it is due to the methodological deficits in the political science sub-disciplines of international relations and comparative political science and the lack of adequate data to conduct significant studies in this field with more cases. It suggests that many hypotheses about the causes of fragile, disintegrating, and broken statehood have been formulated in the scientific literature but have not yet been verified.[1] This research, however, does not remain scientifically abstract but is closely related to the specificity of political debates. In this context, the research field of the analysis undertaken is often used instrumentally to legitimize negative phenomena occurring in the dimension of international relations, especially within the Third World countries.

It is therefore not surprising that practically in the last twenty years, the issue of 'fragile states' has become a troublesome 'wicked problem,' as well as a difficult challenge for the international community and the circles of aid organizations dealing with the issues of developing countries. Unfortunately, the term 'wicked problems' in the context of fragile states cannot be clearly and plainly defined. The *diferencia specifica* of the problem diverges, depending on many diverse and varied factors, which leads to different concepts and, therefore, is associated with a pluralistic debate about the nature of the various issues as well as their potential solutions. In other words, (1) wicked problems are composed of many interdependent factors and cause-effect relationships. The above factors are challenging to identify *a priori* and often become apparent only in the context of a specific socio-political situation and specific solutions. In turn, the proposed solutions usually have many - often even contradictory - goals, which require making "reasonable" compromises. As a result, misunderstandings about causality and objectives contribute to difficulties in defining the problem and developing constructive solutions. In this sense, (2) wicked

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[1] Ch. Lamont, *Research Methods in International Relations* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2021).

problems do not have a clear and unequivocal solution. Therefore, answers to wicked problems cannot be judged solely in the moral terms of good or bad. The proposed solutions are often "good enough" factors politically determined or conditioned by limited information and material resources.[2]

In this context, several different concepts emerged dealing with the involvement in the processes of constructive systemic transformation of fragile states, which soon became a vital priority of the international community working for conflict resolution, socio-political stabilization, and peace in destabilized regions of the periphery of the modern world. It was significantly related to the concerns that arose at the junction of several important areas of international politics, which primarily concerned (a) the issue of emphasis on international security strategies (including the threat of international terrorism) and building stability and peace, especially in destabilized regions affected by armed conflicts; (b) support for the administrative power structures of fragile states motivated by the concern to integrate the effectiveness of the functioning of the state with its development; and (c) the belief that political and economic collapse and underdevelopment, as well as social destabilization, stagnation and overwhelming uncertainty (individual and international), are integrally correlated.[3] It is estimated that over a billion people - including approximately 340 million people suffering from extreme poverty in the world - live in a group of 30–50 fragile states, located mainly on the African continent.[4]

After all, the term 'fragile state' still raises a lot of controversy and heated discussions among researchers of international relations. By and large, the above concept is evoked in the context of the erosion of the state, the collapse of the social and economic order, violent socio-political conflicts, as well as mass violations of human rights and humanitarian crises. As a result, the disintegration of the administrative structures of fragile states, social divisions, ethnic struggles, destabilization of the political scene, and the lack of legitimacy leads to a situation in which it is difficult to find a recognizable core of the legitimate central government. In this case, the verifier of the erosion of an unstable state will be the category of the effectiveness of the exercised power. However, the above factor is qualitative. In this sense, it is a counterargument to quantitative changes in the efficiency of state administration in the distribution of essential goods (a key verifier of the degree of collapse of a fragile state). From a sociological point of view, in the case of an unstable and fragile state, one is dealing with a gradual disintegration of the core of power, which is associated with the loss of the monopoly on the use of coercion.

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[2] D.W. Brinkerhoff, "State Fragility and Failure as Wicked Problems: Beyond Naming and Taming," *Third World Quarterly* 35 no. 2 (2014): 333–44.

[3] L. Andersen, "Fragile States on the International Agenda," in *Fragile Situations,* eds., L. Engberg-Pedersen, L. Andersen, F. Stepputat, D. Jung (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2008), 7–20; R.B. Zoellick, "Fragile States: Securing Development," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 50 no. 6 (2008): 67–84.

[4] P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Therefore, the presentation of the concept of a 'fragile state,' its genesis, as well as the specificity of the conditions determining the development dynamics of the above issue may stimulate and enrich the debate on the shaping of fragile state structures, not only through the analysis of specific elements - both hidden or exposed - related to the concept of hybridity, which seems to be often ambivalent and politically uncertain. It is also associated with the so-called 'added value' that bridges the analytical gap between the usually - deceptively - unrelated concepts of state-building and nation-building of fragile states. Moreover, the conceptualization of the issue of shaping the state understood as the process of 'rule normalization' has important implications for interpreting the complex and thorny political situation of fragile states, drawing attention to the historical context that determines the specificity of political processes, and focusing on appropriate forms of government as an independent variable influencing the right and legitimized state structures.

The concept of the 'fragile state': origins and definitions

Over the last two decades, the research discourse in the science of international relations and global development has returned to the state-centered narrative of international reality.[5] In this sense, however, the modern state can be defined as a historically grounded social organization that successfully claims a monopoly on the use of violence, controls its territory and population, and is responsible for providing services, as well as being recognized by other states.[6] In this context, the various functions of modern states can be divided into three categories: security, power representation, and concern for the common good (well-being and prosperity). These functions define the model of statehood on which all modern states are based.[7] In other words, a state perceived as a sovereign institution represents the entire society inhabiting its territory and, therefore, is responsible for the functioning of the administration, both at the central and local levels.[8]

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[5] J. Isensee, "Staat und Verfassung," in *Handbuch des Staatsrechts der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,* J. Isensee, P. Kirchhof (Hrsg.), (Bd. I, Heidelberg: C.F. Müller Verlag, 1987), 3–106; G. Jellinek, *Allgemeine Staatslehre* (Bad Homburg-Berlin-Zürich: Gehlen, 1966); J. Kuciński, *Podstawy wiedzy o państwie* (Warszawa: C.H. Beck, 2003), 49–52; M. Muszyński, *Państwo w prawie międzynarodowym: Istota, rodzaje i atrybuty* (Bielsko Biała: Wydawnictwo STO, 2012).

[6] G. Sørensen, *Changes in Statehood: The Transformation of International Relations* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

[7] K. Krause and O. Jütersonke, "Seeking out the State: Fragile States and International Governance," *Politorbis* 42 no. 1 (2007): 5–12.

[8] A. Antoszewski and T. Łoś-Nowak, "Państwo," in *Leksykon politologii,* (red.) A. Antoszewski, R. Herbut (Wrocław: Atla, 1995) 2, 261; J. Migdal, *The State in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); M. Weber, *Economy and Society* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013).

Nevertheless, the situation becomes more complicated in the case of the so-called 'fragile states'. The genesis of this concept, however, has a long trajectory dating back to the post-war rivalry between East and West, the repercussions of which also affected the socio-political and economic situation of peripheral states, often referred to as Third World states. Therefore, at the end of the Cold War, to describe dysfunctional states in permanent conflict the term 'failed state' appeared. However, already at the turn of the 60s and 70s, Gunnar Myrdal introduced the concept of a "soft state" to indicate backward and corrupt post-colonial states in Asia.[9] In 1987, Robert Jackson coined the term "quasi-states".[10] Though, many years before, the above problem has absorbed the attention of researchers and political commentators. However, at that time, it was seen as merely a symptom of a situational 'weakness' of the state.[11] The perception of this phenomenon was also different. While until the beginning of the 1990s, it was treated by the international community as an economic problem (underdevelopment) of marginal (regional) importance, over the years (especially after the events of September 11, 2001), it became the focus of the international community's attention as a severe problem concerning global security.

As a result of 'securitization', the above problem was recognized as a complex issue of the effectiveness of governance, which has important implications for international security, threatening the achievement of political order on a global scale. As is known, in globalization processes, it is impossible to isolate dysfunctional and fragile states from the international environment, leaving them to themselves. Although the progression of the weakening or collapse of the state has been the subject of extensive social and political science research for at least several decades, it still eludes unambiguous definition due to its dynamics, multiformity, and heterogeneousness. The present-day cases of state dysfunction, however, can be reduced to three interrelated features: (1) a deficit in the social legitimacy of the state-government, (2) weakened control over its territory and population, and (3) dysfunction in providing citizens with essential public services.[12]

Yet, the standardization and definition of the discussed issue raise a lot of controversies. While no one denies the existence of a discrepancy between the law and the emergence of a new, unforeseen threat to the stability of the international order, conceptual disputes over specific regulations arise. It is mainly related to the legal and political consequences of normalizing the facts connecting to assessments

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[9] G. Myrdal, "The Soft States of South Asia: The Civil Servant Problem." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 25 no. 4 (1969): 7–10.

[10] R.H. Jackson, "Quasi-states, dual regimes, and neoclassical theory: International jurisprudence and the Third World," *International Organization* 41 no. 4 (1987): 519–549.

[11] R.H. Jackson and C.G. Rosberg, "Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood," *World Politics* 35 no. 1 (1982): 1–24.

[12] G. Gil, *Upadanie państwa w stosunkach międzynarodowych po zimnej wojnie* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2015).

and values as well as doubts about using concepts of a descriptive-normative nature, which is precisely the term 'fragile state'. Its evaluative character primarily manifests in placing the 'fragile state' in opposition to the 'ordinary state'. Such an assessment strikes the foundation of contemporary international law based on the sovereignty of states. So, the introduction of this term into legal language may create a risk of abuse, becoming a politically determined shortcut, causing legal effects that are not reflected in the applicable norms. However, one cannot run away from a real problem concerning the consequences of solving it. Still, one should try to explain that it will not produce harmful and undesirable results.

Nowadays, however, many concepts describe the nature and specificity of states that do not meet the traditional standards typical of the Weberian definition of the rule of law's state. In other words, several definitions have emerged to describe a wide range of states that diverge from the standard type of the Western-style state concept. These include, but are not limited to, such terms as failed, collapsed, and failing states, as well as fragile states, also known as a rogue and challenging partnerships, crisis and poorly performing states, as well as low-income states under stress. However, in the case of failed or collapsed states, the breakdown or paralysis of state structures results from a complete failure of the politics and management of a sovereign state. Occasionally, this kind of state can lead to the collapse of a state, such as in Yemen, Somalia, or South Sudan. Time and again, state collapse, as well as its downfall or breakdown, manifests itself in the dysfunction of the power apparatus, which is expressed in the ubiquitous corruption, disintegration, and ineffectiveness of the state administration, as well as the lack of communication and interaction between the government and society combined with the loss of legitimacy of state power, etc. Expressed another way, a failed state is a political entity in which power structures and social infrastructure have collapsed. Although there is no universal definition of this concept, failed state means a state of general dysfunction of the country, which refers to the deficit of primary attributes of power, including - above all - the legitimacy and effectiveness of governing.[13] However, in official terms - and therefore under international law - the failed state remains a state after all. Yet, it often ceases to resemble it in factual terms, and – frequently – it may even become its contradiction (unwilling state). A failed state is therefore treated in international relations as a definitive anomaly. Yet, the term failed itself due to the discrepancy between the formal and legal status and the actual status.[14]

Today, however, many theories and definitions have emerged to describe a wide range of situational contexts that deviate from the standardized type of Western-style concept of the state. These include, but are not limited to, such terms as failed, collapsed, and failing states, as well as fragile states, also known as rogue and

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[13] Ibid.

[14] J. Zajadło, "Prawo międzynarodowe wobec problemu 'państwa upadłego," *Państwo i Prawo* 2 (2005): 3–20.

challenging partnerships, poorly performing states, as well as low-income states under stress. Nevertheless, in the case of failed or collapsed states, the breakdown or paralysis of state structures results from a complete failure of the politics and management of a sovereign state. Occasionally, this kind of state can lead to the collapse of a state, such as in Yemen, Somalia, or South Sudan. The failure of the state, or its breakdown, often manifests itself in the dysfunction of the power apparatus, which is expressed in the ubiquitous corruption, disintegration, and ineffectiveness of the state administration, as well as the lack of communication and interaction between the government and society combined with the loss of legitimacy of state power, etc.[15] However, in official terms - and therefore under international law - the failed state remains a state after all. Yet, it often ceases to resemble it in factual terms, and – frequently – it may even become its contradiction (unwilling state). Therefore, a failed state is treated in international relations as a definitive anomaly.[16]

Contrary to failed or collapsed state, however, a fragile state - occasionally described as a weak state - is characterized by poor ability to meet basic needs and public services, often also with poor legitimacy of state authority. Although there is an intense debate around the concept and definition of a fragile state, the very term "fragile state" seems highly controversial for many detractors. Some opponents even claim that it contains many normatively inaccurate assumptions relating to, among other things, based on what legal principles and norms the state should function and achieve its goals. Additionally, the old Weberian paradigm still dominates in the international environment, emphasizing the Western model of statehood.[17] Nevertheless, despite various criticisms of the fragile state concept, few of its opponents would allow themselves to question the severe influence that this group of countries has on the strategy of regional and international security, as well as the socio-political and economic stabilization of many susceptible regions of the Third World.

These days, however, the concepts of 'fragile states' have found wide application in diplomatic negotiations regarding global security, peacekeeping, poverty reduction, humanitarian aid, and even international trade agreements. In other words, the term 'fragile state' has been adopted in particular by Western governments and international political analysts to identify and rank the range of developing countries facing violence and conflict, political instability, severe poverty, and other threats to security and development. However, these countries are unable to develop on their own but pose a potential threat to regional or global security.[18] According to the German Federal

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] L. Engberg-Pedersen, "Fragile Situations and International Support," in *Fragile Situations,* ed. L. Engberg-Pedersen, L. Andersen, F. Stepputat, D. Jung, (Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen 2008), 43–56.

[18] O. Nay, "Fragile and failed states: Critical perspectives on conceptual hybrids," *International Political Science Review* 34 no. 3 (2013): 326–341.

Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), "fragile statehood exists in situations where there is a low level of government performance, where state institutions are weak or on the verge of collapse and where the state either fails to perform core roles or performs them wholly inadequately".[19]

In turn, according to the Council of the European Union (EU), "fragility refers to weak or failing structures and to situations where the social contract is broken due to the state's incapacity or unwillingness to deal with its basic functions, meets its obligations and responsibilities regarding service delivery, management of resources, the rule of law, equitable access to power, security and safety of the populace and protection and promotion of citizens' rights and freedoms".[20] In other words, pockets of fragility may occur at a subnational level, making it hard to keep the fragile state's terminology. The States of Fragility Report 2015 marks a change towards defining dimensions of fragility: violence, justice, institutions, economic foundations, and resilience.[21] As the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) put it: "A state or context is described as fragile if a significant proportion of the population does not regard the state as the legitimate framework for the exercise of power if the state does not or cannot exercise its monopoly of the legitimate use of force within its territory, and if the state is unable or unwilling to provide basic goods and services to a significant part of the population" (ibid, 36). The UK Department for International Development (DfID) defined fragility as a state's unwillingness or incapacity to use domestic and international resources to deliver security, social service, economic growth, and legitimate political institutions[22]. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) uses the term 'fragile states' to refer to a broad range of failing, failed, and recovering states. Though the distinction among them is not always clear in practice, as fragile states rarely travel a predictable path of failure and recovery, and the labels may mask sub-state and regional conditions (insurgencies, factions, etc.) that may be essential factors in the context of conflict situations and states' fragility.[23] In turn, according to the World Bank, fragile states or low-income countries under stress (LICUS) deteriorate from armed conflicts, low *per capita*

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[19] BMZ, *Development-Oriented Transformation in Conditions of Fragile Statehood and Poor Government Performance.* Strategies 153, (Bonn: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2007).

[20] Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on an EU response to situations of fragility* (Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2007).

[21] O.A. Akanbi *et al.*, *Avoid the Fall or Fly Again: Turning Points of State Fragility,* Working Paper No. 2021/133, International Monetary Found, 2021.

[22] M.M. Torres and M. Anderson, *Fragile States: Defining Difficult Environments for Poverty Reduction,* PRDE Working Paper 1, UK Department for International Development, 2004, http://peacebuildingcentre.com/ pbc_documents/dfid_fragile_states-defining_difficult_environments.pdf (derived July 16, 2021).

[23] U.S. Agency for International Development, *Fragile States Strategy,* 2005, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/ pdaca999.pdf (derived July 16, 2021).

GDP, high infant mortality rates, and low access to better-quality water and sanitation.[24] In general, fragile states are either unable or unwilling to deliver the core functions of security, property protection, basic public services, and essential infrastructure to the majority of their people.[25]

In this sense, the term 'fragile state' has spread internationally, especially among donors, international agencies involved in aid programs, and some governments, especially in the areas of development, humanitarian aid, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. In particular, since the mid-2000s, the fragile state has been widely used by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank to identify the poorest and most fragile countries that cannot meet the minimum standards set by significant development aid donors. In this context, many other terms are also used: states defined as weak, vulnerable, unstable, and uncertain, in crisis, fallen, fragmented, suspended, broken, shadowy, as well as "quasi" and warlords' states. It could go on. Nevertheless, each concept relates to a specific socio-political situation of a particular country.[26] However, a 'fragile state' idea is an overarching concept used by many scientists and analysts to depict countries where state institutions' legitimacy, authority, and capacity are dramatically declining, weak, or degenerated.[27]

The emergence of the 'fragile state' agenda

Over the last two decades, there has been an evident change in the strategy of international aid organizations, which both support programs resolving military disputes and conflicts as well as support the development and stabilization of the socio-political situation in fragile states. However, the above paradigm shift is related to the transition to a new system of allocating aid programs.[28] In the late 1990s, as the World Bank expressed increasing interest in the influence of local governments on the outcomes of national aid programs, major traditional donors launched an 'aid

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[24] The World Bank, *Engaging with Fragile States: An IEG Review of World Bank Support to Low-Income Countries Under Stress,* 2006, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/7155/382850Revised01gile0states01PUBLIC1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (derived July 17, 2021).

[25] D. Cammack *et al.*, *Donors and the Fragile States' Agenda: A Survey of Current Thinking and Practice* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2006).

[26] I.O. Albert and I.O. Oleyede, *Dynamics of the peace process* (Illorin, Nigeria: Center for Peace and Strategic Studies, 2010); A. Odhiambo, "The Economics of Conflict among Marginalized Peoples of Eastern Africa," in *Conflict Resolution in Africa,* F.M. Deng, I.W. Zartman eds., Washington: Brookings Institute, 1991), 292–296; S. Patrick, *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 326–341.

effectiveness' debate. It resulted in the signing in 2002 of the 'Monterey Consensus on Financing Development'.[29]

Nonetheless, the idea was that the donors of international aid should consider the specificity of recipient countries in their aid programs, especially the reality of the functioning of fragile states' governmental institutions. The above recommendations were a form of preparation of international aid institutions to establish new resource allocation mechanisms. These mechanisms evaluated the 'performance' of the fragile states' governments, i.e., their practical ability to maintain management mechanisms ensuring the effectiveness of material resource redistribution under the Official Development Assistance (ODA). The allocation of aid began in line with the principle of 'selectivity', allocating the most funds to countries with the most 'effective' state administration institutions representing the 'right' foreign policy strategy and capable of effectively controlling the country's internal situation.[30]

The particular interest of Western donors from fragile states appeared due to donors representing aid organizations switching to the so-called 'selective aid'. Despite focusing aid programs on poverty alleviation (and not on economic growth), a few countries with weak performance indicators of state administration, but in a severe political crisis, were unable to meet the new standards imposed by international organizations. The concentration of aid funds on the so-called 'relevant developing countries' led to the marginalization of countries with 'ineffective' state administration institutions. It sparked increasing criticism of international financial institutions from the US Congress. Growing resentment, therefore, prompted the World Bank to establish an initiative in 2001 targeting low-income countries under stress. As a result, on the initiative of the World Bank, aid programs were developed to support fragile states struggling with serious problems caused by the effects of armed conflicts, violence, and political perturbations.[31] It led to a reformulation of the nature of the discussion and - consequently - to focus on programs aimed at more effective building of the rule of law, shaping institutions promoting the principles of pluralistic coexistence, stability, and peace.

The idea that 'state fragility' could pose a threat to Western national security gained additional popularity after September 11, 2001, when an al-Qaeda terrorist network attacked the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington.

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[29] United Nations, *Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development,* Final Text of Agreements and Commitments Adopted at the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, 18–22 March 2002, New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Financing for Development Office, 2002.

[30] Ibid., 326–41.

[31] The World Bank, *World Bank Group Work in Low-income Countries under Stress. A Task Force Report* (Washington, DC: World Bank/Task Force on the Work of the World Bank Group in Low-income Countries Under Stress, 2002).

As the government of Afghanistan supported members of the terrorist network, other countries with legalized, internationally recognized status or without institutionalized government structures suddenly began to be seen as potential centers of criminal activity and global terrorism. Whether they are considered fragile states in the current security discourse - or 'failed' or 'fragile' from the aid organizations' perspective - most analysts agreed that the new international security policy would require a focus on the capabilities of national governments. The 'south' controls security issues in their territories and provides their citizens with primary benefits and services. In the context of foreign policy, the concept of linking security and development issues has been popularized.

The practical consequences of the 'securitization' of the political discourse on fragile states are presented in the reconceptualization of threats to international security by Kofi Atta Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In his opinion, the main threat to world security comes from governments that have been allowed to break the rights of their citizens. The above states "have become a threat not only to their own nation, but also to their neighbors, and even to the whole world".[32] It is estimated that 105 countries in the world where power - to a greater or lesser extent - is in the hands of authoritarian, oppressive, or semi-oppressive regimes fall under the broad definition of states that are a potential terrorist threat to the international community.[33]

Two major public donors, the US and the UK, played a leading role in creating the political agenda for the fragility concerning international aid organizations. The new directives on cooperation between the UK and developing countries (after the creation of the Department for International Development in 1997) placed particular emphasis on poverty reduction, security, recognition of the role of the state in developing countries, supporting economic agreements, as well as ensuring law and laws to protect human rights. American development aid programs also played a significant role in shaping the concept of fragile states in the doctrine of 'selective' aid.

In 2004, the US Congress obliged the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to emphasize support for developing countries. An independent agency, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, was also established to assist countries selected based on their performance regarding their political effectiveness and institutional capacity. The development of the principle of selectivity within the organizational structure of the US bilateral aid program created the conditions that made it possible to start a political discussion on the fragility and development of states particularly at risk of armed conflict. In 2005, USAID developed specific policy goals for intervention

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[32] K. Annan, *We can Love What We Are, without Hating What - and Who We Are Not* (Nobel Lecture, Oslo, 10 December 2001), https://www.un.org/press/en/2001/sgsm8071.doc.htm (derived July 12, 2021).

[33] S. Grimm, N. Lemay-Hebert and O. Nay, "'Fragile States': introducing a political concept," *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2014): 197–209.

in fragile states (known as 'vulnerable states' or 'states in crisis'), depending on the degree of instability of political power in a given territory, the state's ability to provide essential services to the population and legitimacy of state's power. In line with the 'defense, development, and diplomacy (3D)' doctrine, the aid agency has also included defense and diplomatic objectives in its development strategy.[34]

In the context of US political strategy, the National Security Guidelines of September 2002 identified fragile states as a more significant threat to world peace and security than states pursuing policies of confrontation and conquest.[35] The EU spoke in a similar vein, announcing in 2003 that the 'failed states' also posed a serious threat to European security.[36] In practice, this meant a paradigm shift in entire international politics. The international bodies have recognized that modern wars are a minor problem of the relations between states than a problem within states. The above analysis was supported by political science and sociological research showing that the 'weakness of states' is currently one of the most important reasons responsible for armed conflicts requiring 'peacekeeping interventions' from the outside.[37]

Reassessment of the Westphalian approach to security and 'development'

Since Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner[38] outlined the problem in the early 1990s, scientific research into fragile states has significantly transformed. Nevertheless, at the center of contemporary literature on the subject, there is still a kind of dichotomy between political pragmatists seeking to solve specific problems affecting fragile states and the world of science who criticize the theoretical findings to date, their methodology, and the precision of the developed conceptual apparatus, etc.[39] However, scholars dealing with the theoretical aspect of research are more likely to question the values and assumptions underlying fragile states.[40]

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[34] OECD, *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2005); OECD, *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations* (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007); OECD, *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations: Somali Republic* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2011).

[35] C. Cordero and K. Galgano, *The Department of Homeland Security: Priorities for Reform* (Washington: Center for a New American Security, 2021).

[36] A. Toje, "The 2003 European Union Security Strategy: A Critical Appraisal," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 10, (2005): 129.

[37] E. Stepanova, "Trends in Armed Conflicts: One-Sided Violence against Civilians," in *SIPRI Yearbook Summary 2008: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43–71.

[38] G.B. Helman and S.R. Ratner, "Saving Failed States," *Foreign Policy* 89 no. 4 (1993): 3–20; E. Ikpe, "Challenging the Discourse on Fragile States," *Conflict, Security and Development* 7, no. 1 (2007): 85–124.

[39] A. Bellamy, "The 'Next Stage' in Peace Operations Theory?" in *Peace Operations and Global Order,* (London: Routledge, 2005), 17–38.

[40] C. Kreß, "Major Post-Westphalian Shifts and Some Important Neo-Westphalian Hesitations in The State Practice on the International Law on the Use of Force," *Journal on the Use of Force and International Law* 1, no. 1 (2014): 11–54.

With solving thorny fragile states' problems, many scientists have studied how to predict their failure.[41] Others explored the importance of traditional and non-traditional political actors involved in the state-building process as well as the current context of creating normative standards and good practices (soft laws) in international state-building.[42] Given the scale of state fragility, some researchers have adopted a quantitative approach.[43] Others opted for a qualitative approach that explores the specific mechanisms of state fragility in particular case studies.[44]

In this context, Sebastian Ziaja and Javier Fabra Mata criticized the validity of the concept of fragile states. In their opinion, although most of the analyzed indices allow classifying some countries as unstable (e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan, Angola, etc.), the same index refers differently to the status of other countries (e.g., Cuba, Israel, China, or Korea Northern).[45] On the other hand, Tobias Hagman and Markus Hoehne criticize the 'unjustified belief' that there is an interdependence between the "nation-state" and the concept of "state failure." To this end, they demonstrate the negative implications of using the notion with empirical evidence obtained from the territories of Somalia.[46] On the other hand, Mohammed Nuruzzaman, after analyzing the American intervention policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, similarly draws attention to the harmful effects of unreflective use of such stigmatizing terms as "state failure" or "state collapse" in international relations.[47] Charles Call criticizes the concept of 'state failure' as methodologically underdeveloped and practically inconsistent, as it combines completely different categories of states. At the same time, he recommends that international aid donors "react formally" to increase the efficiency of state administrative structures because - even though as fragile states – they differ drastically in terms of security, the efficiency of state administration, legitimacy, and legality.[48] In this case, Olivier Nay questions the analytical foundations of the fragile and failed states research program, interpreting its methodological framework as a reactivation of the so-called "development theories".[49]

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[41] F. Stewart and G. Grown, *Fragile States, Overview no. 3* (Oxford: Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, 2010); S. Ziaja and J.F. Mata, *State Fragility Indices: Potentials, Messages, and Limitations,* DIE Briefing Paper 10/2010, Bonn: German Development Institute, 2010.

[42] D. Brinkerhoff, "State Fragility and Governance: Conflict Mitigation and Subnational Perspectives," *Development Policy Review* 29, no. 2 (2011): 131–53.

[43] D. Carment, "Assessing State Failure: Implications for Theory and Policy," *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2003): 407–27; Ibid., 85–124.

[44] Ibid., 131–53.

[45] Ibid.

[46] T. Hagmann and M.V. Hoehne, "Failures of the State Failure Debate: Evidence from the Somali Territories," *Journal of International Development* 21, no. 1 (2009): 42–57.

[47] M. Nuruzzaman, "Revisiting the Category of Fragile and Failed States in International Relations," *International Studies* 46, no. 3 (2009): 271–94.

[48] T. Call Ch, "Beyond the 'Failed State': Toward Conceptual Alternatives," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 2 (2011): 303–26.

[49] Ibid., 326–41.

Nevertheless, the concepts of 'fragile states' function in the literature as a vital element of the discourse on the mutual relations between the international community and developing countries, significantly affected by a destabilizing armed conflict. Thanks to the growing awareness of the shortcomings and limitations of the concept of the fragile state - both among scientists and policymakers - many "more diplomatic" terms have appeared to describe the above issues: such as "situations of fragility" (proposed in 2007 by OECD), "countries and regions in crisis," or post-crisis and fragile situation".[50]

However, Sonja Grimm and Gerald Schneider criticize the fact that the EU has not yet agreed on a clear definition of 'state fragility'. At the same time, they highlight three factors that try to explain this situation: first, the complex institutional framework of the EU, which hampers policy coherence; second, the dynamics of change at the international level, the standards of which must be respected by the Union; and third, EU diplomatic efforts to maintain cooperative relations with recipient countries identified as "fragile." The latter aspect, in particular, reveals a central dilemma faced by many international donors. While they may seek to avoid classification through a label that is seen as highly political, the lack of a clear strategy to deal with the consequences of state "fragility" may deprive donors of the ability to develop meaningful and sustainable state-aware policies to overcome governance deficits, socio-economic development and in the field of international security.[51] In turn, Isabel Rocha De Siqueira critically evaluates the method of data acquisition and research methodology used to prepare aid concepts. It is primarily about using sociological data to define the specifics and manage 'fragile states'. Above all, however, De Siqueira emphasizes the difficulties associated with assigning empirical data to sensitive issues related to conflict situations. Therefore, she questions the validity and credibility of interpretations based on this type of research. In her research, she concludes that statistical and sociological data are often 'used' by the international bureaucratic system, which - demonstrating its efficiency, dynamism, and entrepreneurship - is directed primarily at the politically correct interpretation of research on fragile states.[52]

Olivier Nay reviewed the role of OECD and the World Bank in the context of the doctrine of international humanitarian aid, related information policy, and the so-called peace interventions related to the concept of development and international security. In his opinion, the resulting conclusions emphasize that the above doctrine undoubtedly strengthened the hegemony of OECD and World Bank member states in

[50] C. Mcloughlin, *Topic Guide on Fragile States* (Birmingham: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham, 2012).

[51] S. Grimm and G. Schneider, *Predicting Social Tipping Points,* Discussion Paper 8/2011, Bonn: German Development Institute, 2011.

[52] I.R. De Siqueira, "Symbolic Power in Development Politics: Can "Fragile States" Fight with Numbers?" *Global Governance* 23, (2017): 43–55.

their relations with states described as unstable.[53] On the other hand, Sonja Grimm, after analyzing the official publications of international agencies dealing with humanitarian aid, documents, and strategic communications of the European Union, shows the EU's indecisiveness in the instability of countries affected by the political and economic crisis and armed conflict. It puts forward three main conclusions: first, the EU bodies must define the problem more precisely in a way that supports the development of aid strategies; second, given the current situation, the EU has a tendency to respond to proposals from other international organizations, but not to develop its own coherent agenda concerning fragile states; and third, that the EU bodies refrain from using the term political instability in partnerships with developing countries, which undoubtedly hampers an adequate analysis of the fragile state's problem.[54]

In this context, it is crucial to understand why the fragile state concept, despite its various shortcomings and shortcomings, is an essential element of international security, development, and maintaining mutual relations, especially with developing countries. Therefore, when analyzing the issue of fragile states, it is worth considering the question: why the 'fragile state' concept, despite many analytical deficiencies, remains such an essential element of discussions in international bodies responsible for implementing aid policy, especially to peripheral 'Third World' countries? Proper understanding of the above problems and exposing the moral ambiguity of the discussed issues could be helpful to understand better the 'reality' of so many 'military peace interventions', which never achieved their projected goals. Nevertheless, the achievement of the intended purposes depends not only on the political will of decision-makers defining the priorities of world policy towards fragile states but also - or perhaps most of all - on the local party-political elites responsible for the political strategies implemented in the reality of fallen states.

Conclusion

In the context of the above analysis, three main conclusions emerge. Firstly, the term 'fragile state' links many divergent views and ideas. Nevertheless, on the one hand, they aim to define a conceptual approach to the fragile state's issue. Still, on the other hand, this concept is a normative tool and a political 'label' widely used by international organizations and Western donors of aid programs legitimizing their strategic goals in foreign policy.

Secondly, the concept of a 'fragile state' is far from conceptually unambiguous, despite efforts by many international institutions to create a more explicit and precise definition. The above term is used by various actors of the political scene representing different programs as well as different political, ethnic, and national contexts. The institutional weaknesses of the power apparatus, as well as the permanent political and

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[53] Ibid., 131–53.

[54] Ibid.

economic crisis of failed states, also play an essential role here. As a result, the 'frag-ile state' concept is subject to various interpretations. Its use as an analytical method of understanding political, social, and economic factors that may condition instability in developing countries is highly problematic. Thus, the term 'fragile state' can be better understood as a kind of 'political narrative' as well, as its meaning reflects its leading proponents' strategic visions and political goals.

Finally, political actors operating within the 'fragile states' did not remain passive to the internationalization of this concept. The ability to function in the conditions of an authoritarian state gave them additional advantages. Moreover, their potential allowed them to effectively resist, ignore, engage their local resources, withdraw, as well as use the international involvement of foreign political centers. In addition, the concept of 'fragile states', especially its ambiguity and dynamics concerning political discourse, is essential in the context of legitimizing power in politically unstable states often affected by cruel armed conflicts.

Nevertheless, research into the various forms of state fragility has made significant progress over the past two decades and brought many thought-provoking innovations, especially in theoretical and conceptual dimensions. However, many reluctances and hesitations are raised by the empirical extent of the research on weaknesses and fragility of falling states. It applies to various issues, but most of all, it refers to systemic and adequate research on the complex causes of states' fragility. In this case, both qualitative and quantitative research display many shortcomings. Although the qualitative empirical study of the causes of states' fragility largely contributed to developing this theory and research hypotheses, the applied compara-tive methods are not always suitable for their scientifically systematic verification and validation. On the other hand, the quantitative approach has problems verifying the appropriate amount of scientific data, and it applies only to some of the existing theories and hypotheses.[55]

However, to overcome the above problems and deficits, research projects investigating the causes of states' fragility should meet the following requirements: First, the obtained theorems should be as general as possible and not be limited to a single particular case.[56] For this purpose, it is necessary to define the concept of 'fragility' precisely. The deductive method enables the most precise definition of the number of various cases. Limiting ourselves to the issue of fragility of the state, comparative research should - as far as possible - cover the total number of state's fragility cases and compare it with the appropriate number of 'model' cases. Concerning the 'quantitative approach', it is essential to pay attention to the relationship between the issues of states' fragility and the circumstances leading to the weakening, fragmentation, and fragility of the state power system, based on which causal links

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

should be identified.[57] In the case of exceptional as well as unusual situations (such as a breakdown of the state power system, the coup d'état, armed conflict, military intervention, etc.), estimating the state of affairs may be difficult because the variety of the dependent variables may underestimate the probability of such or other proceedings. However, econometric methods allow a deeper analysis of this problem.[58] Secondly, it is vital to capture the causal equivalence of a state's fragility (the principle that starts from different sources, one can arrive at the same results). Methods based on the principles of set theory play an important role here, as they enable a deeper analysis of equifinal processes.[59] Statistical models play an essential role here, helpful in studying the effects of interactions between many players on the political scene. Consolidating the application of the above research methods may prove very helpful due to their different assumptions regarding the analysis of the state's fragility causality (probabilistic and deterministic causality). They enable multidimensional studies of the cause-and-effect links of the state's fragility phenomenon. They are essential for validating and invalidating previously adopted research hypotheses.[60] Thirdly, taking into account the complex causal structure of the state's fragility, particular attention should be paid to the issues of bias and instrumental treatment of research results. Therefore, all relevant research factors should be considered whenever possible. Since the political dynamics that determine the processes taking place determine the causal factors in modern analyses, the research project cannot show the structural explanatory elements. Moreover, the research must not rely on 'proxy variables' of questionable validity, even if there is currently no access to properly validated data.[61]

Currently, however, in the environment of international experts of global problems and representatives of aid organizations, there is a fundamental consensus that without reinterpreted goals and priorities of the international involvement strategy, fragile state, in terms of underdevelopment, will still remain outsiders in the tail of the so-called 'developing' Third World countries. At the same time, it is recognized that aid delivery in fragile and failing contexts cannot follow the traditional model. The complex instability conditions require a coordinated and multidimensional approach that can combine support for forming effective structures of the rule of law, political and economic stabilization, as well as building lasting bonds based on reconciliation and peace. Yet, it requires a complete and integrated commitment, both from the state's administrative structures as well as civil society.[62] Nevertheless, fragile states still

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[57] Ibid.

[58] P.R. Rosenbaum, *Design of Observational Studies* (New York: Springer, 2010).

[59] A. Bennett, "Case Study Methods: Design, Use, and Comparative Advantages," in *Models, Numbers, and Cases:Methods for Studying International Relations,* ed. D. Sprinz and Y. Wolinsky-Namias (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 19–55.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Department for International Development, *Why We Need to Work More Effectively in Fragile States* (DFID, London, 2005).

do not seem to be adequately supported by international aid organizations, especially when considering contemporary models of material and logistics support allocation and expert knowledge. In this sense, the flow of aid seems to be still poorly coordinated, unbalanced, and sometimes even chaotic. Therefore, it seems to be often more reactive than preventive.[63]

Data availability

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data are required.

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[63] Ibid., 67–84.