

The Perils of Weakness: Failed states and perceptions of threat in Europe and Australia

DRAFT – Comments welcome

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INTRODUCTION

Failed states are by no means a new feature in international politics. There have been examples of weak and fragile states from the beginning of the modern state system. With decolonization, the number of states, as well as the number of weak states, multiplied. For a long time, this problem was hardly scrutinized by academics and politicians alike.

Before I go into more detail, let me first try to define what state failure is and what meaning it has. The state, say Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg, has two faces: the juridical and the empirical one. The juridical face is turned outward and allows the government to engage in international relations. The empirical one is turned inward and represents the institutional capacity of the state, the government's ability to implement its policies and provide public goods.¹ It is the stability of the empirical aspect of statehood that is at risk when states 'fail'. They stop providing services to their population and the monopoly of violence erodes to the point that armed insurgencies start to gain control over parts of the country. The political system is bereft of legitimacy as citizens shift their loyalties to societal institutions (ethnic, religious, cultural or regional groups). There is no exact threshold for state failure. Instead, there is a continuum of stateness ranging from the weak state (who might yet be able to provide security and a modicum of public goods) to the entirely collapsed state (where state institutions have disappeared in their entirety).

Throughout the postcolonial period, weak states were seen as a symptom of underdevelopment. The problem was a lack of 'state capacity' that would slowly fade as more and more educated nationals were integrated into the bureaucracy. Economic growth would be accompanied by the spread and development of the state's political institutions. Eventually, the problem would solve itself. History disconfirmed that theory, in some cases tragically. The 1990s witnessed a dramatic jump in the number of failed states and, most prominently in Sub-Saharan Africa, an increase in the severity of failure. It appears that weak statehood will continue to be a persistent feature of the international system in the foreseeable future.

Within scholarly literature, failed states have been cast as problems of global concern and as threats to security (be it human, national, or international security). In fact, the article which is commonly seen as the first one on the topic (Helman; Ratner 1992) points out that internal conflicts tend to spill over into wider regions, threatening international peace and security. At the time, this echoed a newfound certainty within the international community: the wars of the future would take place *within* states, rather than *between* them. It was not

¹ Cf. Jackson; Rosberg 1982.

long before politicians became aware of the link between state failure and internal conflict. One of the earliest initiatives on the topic was the State Failure Task Force that the CIA commissioned in 1994 at the request of US vice-president Al Gore. Its task was to study the correlates of state failure (which was later broadened to include several different kinds of political violence, from ethnic wars to genocide) with the aim of identifying key indicators in order to be able to predict future crises.²

This represented a shift in perception: state weakness was no longer simply a lack of development, it was also a security problem for the local population. Previously, development had been seen as a precondition of peace; now, these twin goals had become interlinked, each contributing to the achievement of the other.³ Over the next few years, internal conflict became a humanitarian issue: from Somalia to Kosovo, the international community intervened militarily.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the reasons for this increased international activism. My point is that most military interventions of the 1990s were not undertaken due to any immediate threat to the national security of a Western industrialized country. (One significant exception is the former Yugoslavia where geographical proximity elevated the war to a security threat in the minds of Western European policy elites.)

I argue that there has been a second change in perception. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, the discourse about failed states has changed, quite abruptly in some instances. State failure is no longer a problem of regional, but of global security.⁴ There are many problems threatening developed nations that are being associated with failing states: terrorism, international migration, organized crime and drug trafficking, to take just the most prominent issues.⁵

This paper aims to investigate the ‘securitization’ of failed states within global policy discourse. To this end, the cases of Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the European Union will be studied. The first part of this paper will outline the securitization concept as developed by the Copenhagen School. It will be followed by an evaluation of the claims about the linkages of state failure with terrorism, organized crime and the drug trade. In the third part, the case studies will be presented. The conclusion will summarize what the case studies infer about the state of the security discourse on a global level.

² Cf. Esty 1998.

³ Cf. Duffield 2001.

⁴ Cf. Menkhaus 2003. One example of this new kind of thinking is the recently published report by the Center for Global Development’s Commission on Weak States and US National Security (CGD 2004).

⁵ Cf. Maass; Mephram 2004: 11.

1. SECURITIZATION

The concept of ‘securitization’ has brought a constructivist perspective to security studies. It was developed by the Copenhagen School around Ole Waever and Barry Buzan during the debate concerning the widening and/or deepening of the meaning of security during the 1990s.⁶ They argued that it was meaningless to tie security to a specific referent object or to axiomatically restrict the issues to which it could be applied. Instead of approaching security as a quality of a given object, it was conceptualized as a manner of discourse. As Ole Waever put it, “(t)hreats and security are not objective matters, security is a way to frame and handle an issue.”⁷

This kind of discourse stages issues as “existential threats to a referent object by a securitizing actor who thereby generates endorsement of emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise apply.”⁸ In other words, an issue acquires security relevance when it is presented accordingly in a debate. If this “securitizing move” is accepted by the audience, it elevates the issue from the arena of the ‘merely political’ into a matter of survival. The agent of securitization demands emergency powers (either for himself or for a competent authority, such as the state) that are applied outside previously established boundaries.

A successful securitization attempt has three distinct aspects: firstly, the casting of an issue as an existential threat, secondly, emergency action, and thirdly, “effects on interunit relations”⁹. In other words, the attempt cannot be considered a successful securitization unless the resulting emergency action has some impact on international politics.

2. EVALUATING THE CLAIMS

Over the last few years, there has been growing recognition that the problems of failed states are not confined to the countries in question. There are many regional spillovers as well as global implications that have drawn the interest of decision-makers to this phenomenon. Many allegations have been made as to which international problems are being affected by state failure, or originate in failed states. In the next part, I will outline the theoretical and empirical linkages between failed states and several problems commonly associated with them.

⁶ The term ‘Copenhagen School’ was coined by McSweeney 1996. For the development of the School cf. Huysmans 1998. Hansen 2000 provides a critique.

⁷ Waever 1996: 108.

⁸ Buzan; Waever; de Wilde 1998: 5.

⁹ Buzan; Waever; de Wilde 1998: 26.

2.1 Terrorism

At first glance, failed states seem to offer favorable conditions for the activities of transnational terrorist networks. According to Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev, a weak state “cannot impede a group’s freedom of action but has the veneer of state sovereignty that prevents other, stronger states from taking effective countermeasures.”¹⁰ After it was revealed that Al-Qaeda found a safe haven in Afghanistan, this became a commonly held view. Similarly, the perpetrators of the Mombasa attacks in late 2002 operated out of neighboring Somalia.¹¹ Apart from serving as safe havens and training grounds, failed states provided economic opportunities for Al-Qaeda. There is also some, though yet inconclusive, evidence that points to an involvement of Al-Qaeda in the trade in gemstones and minerals out of war-torn countries like Sierra Leone and the DR Congo.¹²

However, more recent research argues that this paints an incomplete picture. Ulrich Schneckener points out that while the idea for the September 11th attacks was hatched in Afghanistan, it was planned and developed in Germany, with contacts to terrorists operating in other developed nations (such as Spain). He disaggregates the functions that a terrorist networks has to fulfill in order to operate effectively. These include recruitment, training, planning, hiding, logistics and transit, communication and access to resources and financial assets. Each of these functions creates different requirements for an optimum operational base, not all of which are best served in failed states. He concludes that states ‘on the brink of failure’ provide the optimum environment for terrorists to operate in, as these states are still able to offer a modicum of security without being able to effectively implement policy and without widespread support within their own populations.¹³

So, all in all, the empirical connection of state failure and terrorism is less clear-cut than is generally thought. Nevertheless, the impression that such a link exists has become very popular within international politics.

2.2 Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking

The connection of state failure to the cultivation and processing of drugs is well established. Afghanistan has become the principal supplier of opium, while in Colombia, the

¹⁰ Takeyh; Gvosdev 2002: 98. Cf. Rice 2002.

¹¹ It has to be said, however, that Somalia did not evolve into the ‘terrorist haven’ that it was originally feared to become. Cf. International Crisis Group 2002 and Report of the Panel of Experts on Somalia, UN Document No. S/2003/223, 2 March 2003.

¹² Cf. Peel; Catan 2004, Farah 2002 and Lyman; Morrison 2004.

¹³ Cf. Schneckener 2004. Also see Menkhaus 2003.

major cocaine plantations are located in areas outside of the control of the state. Processing of the drugs also takes places in stateless zones.

“The production of hard drugs is concentrated in civil war countries for two main reasons. First, civil war creates territory outside the control of a recognized government on which drugs can be cultivated. It also creates an environment in which many people can behave opportunistically with no cost, because the normal policing institutions are weakened and are unable to control illegal activities. Second, during civil war conventional economic opportunities are severely reduced.”¹⁴ The transport of drugs is facilitated by weak states as well. For example, Haiti has long been an important stopover for cocaine on its way to the United States.¹⁵

Stateless areas offer opportunities for criminal networks who might ally themselves with warlords, rebels and insurgents. These networks profit from the international trade in conflict goods (e.g., diamonds, timber, minerals) that they carry out under the protection of armed gangs. The involvement of a network of Lebanese businessmen in the trade of conflict diamonds from West Africa is well documented as well as the economic relationship between Colombian drug cartels and FARC rebels.¹⁶

Generally, the link between failed states and organized transnational crime is much more robust than in relation to terrorism. However, it is not clear whether these criminal networks are the same that operate in Western countries and, if this is not the case, what kind of relations exist between the separate groups.

2.3 Other consequences

State failure has several other consequences that shall not be discussed in detail. These include refugee flows as people are driven from their homes in search of security, the spread of infectious disease like Malaria or HIV, other activities of international criminal networks like small arms smuggling, money laundering, counterfeiting, slavery or trafficking in human beings as well as threats to biodiversity and the environment.

3. CASE STUDIES

3.1 Methodology

To test my hypothesis that state failure is being securitized since the events of 11 September 2001, I examined the evolving policy discourse in the United Kingdom, Germany,

¹⁴ Collier et al. 2003: 44.

¹⁵ Cf. Polgreen; Weiner 2004.

¹⁶ Cf. Gberie 2002 and Rabasa; Chalk 2001.

the European Union and Australia. In each case, I looked at public statements made by top officials from the Defence and Foreign Affairs Departments as well as by the heads of the executive and publications from these respective branches of government. The study was confined to state officials as securitizing actors because their actions would, firstly, best reflect global discourse trends and, secondly, have the most significant impact on policy. It would be worthwhile to expand this research to include non-state actors in order to trace processes of securitization, e.g., in cases where the government takes up a certain rhetoric first advocated by opposition parties, but this is outside the scope of this paper.

In each case, I tried to identify the context in which failed states were discussed and the language that was used to present them. “It is important to note that the security speech-act is not defined by uttering the word ‘security’. What is essential is the designation of an existential threat requiring emergency action or special measures, and the acceptance of that designation by a significant audience.”¹⁷

3.2 United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) pioneered the use of the term ‘failed states’ in security discourse. While pre-9/11 statements betrayed an interest in stability in developing areas as well as the political will to support conflict prevention and peacekeeping (as the 2000 intervention in Sierra Leone showed), these issues generally were not perceived as having a direct bearing on the security of the United Kingdom.¹⁸

In contrast to this, only three days after the terrorist attacks, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said: “(I)t is no longer tolerable that any states should harbour or give succour to terrorists. The international community must unite as never before to take determined, collective action against the threat that failing and failed states pose to global security.”¹⁹ This ‘call to arms’ became a semi-regular feature in his later speeches as he continued to elaborate more clearly the threat that failed states posed. “Chaos not only brings drugs to our streets, but also human trafficking to our ports and borders. And on 11 September it brought mass murder to the very heart and symbol of the success of the Western world.”²⁰

The 2003 Strategy of the FCO lists several strategic imperatives, the first two of which are 1. preventing WMD proliferation and fighting terrorism, and 2. protecting the UK from illegal immigration, drug trafficking and other international crime.²¹ In numerous FCO statements,

¹⁷ Buzan 1997: 15.

¹⁸ Cf. for example Cook 2001.

¹⁹ Straw 2001a.

²⁰ Straw 2001b.

²¹ Cf. FCO (2003): 31-33.

state failure has been identified as a root cause contributing, both directly and indirectly, to these problems. “Whether it is terrorism, drugs on our streets, asylum seekers at our borders or damage to our overseas trade, we cannot escape the consequences when communities collapse, societies disintegrate and states fail.”²²

Together with the Department of International Development, the FCO commissioned a study of the causes of state instability, to be conducted by the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit. This project seeks to 1. Develop a more effective method of identifying countries at risk, 2. Identify more effective responses to help stabilize affected countries, and 3. Develop systems to facilitate responses by the international community.²³

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) showed a less sharp development than the FCO even though it eventually reached the same conclusions. In 1998, the MoD considered ‘instability’ outside of Europe to be an indirect threat to the United Kingdom’s security, creating human suffering, regional spillover and refugees. In December 2001, regional instability was said to place demands on international organizations but was not considered to bear on the UK’s direct national interests. In July 2002, failed states are being presented as ‘breedings grounds’ for terrorism. And finally, in December 2003, failed states are cast as security threats themselves, serving as safe havens of terrorists, drug runners and other criminals and as sources of mass populations movements and regional conflict. Again, the theme of the failed state as a root cause of security risks turns up.²⁴

Tony Blair began to employ the term in late 2001. Until late 2002, Blair used it exclusively in the context of the ‘war against terrorism’, Al-Qaeda and Afghanistan. Superficially, his approach seemed broadly comparable to Jack Straw’s: “And September 11th showed us what happens when we don't take action, when we leave a failed state basically living on terrorism and drugs, repressing its people brutally. When we leave that state in place then sooner or later we end up dealing with its consequences.”²⁵

However, in contrast to Straw, who generally employed an almost dictionary definition of state failure, occasionally referring to Thomas Hobbes and Max Weber, Tony Blair used the phrase in a different way. For example, in the above statement he characterizes a failed state as ‘repressing its people brutally’. However, a failed state, by its very nature, is unable to repress its population since the institutions of government no longer fulfill their functions. Kal Holsti and Joshua Forrest have argued forcefully that the use of despotic terror was in fact a

²² FCO 2002: 3 (Jack Straw, from the Foreword). Also see FCO (no date), Straw 2001b and 2002.

²³ Cf. Countries at Risk of Instability Background Note (no date).

²⁴ Cf. MoD 1998, 2001, 2002 and 2003. Also see Hoon 2003a and 2003b.

²⁵ Blair 2002a. Also see Blair 2001a, 2001b, 2002b and 2002c.

sign of weakness, a case of the state desperately trying to subdue the people in whose eyes it has lost its legitimacy.²⁶ I completely agree with this, but in my opinion there is a qualitative difference between a despotic state trying to retain its authority and a powerless state completely unable to guarantee even a minimum of security, much less threaten the population. In any case, it was not that Tony Blair had a different opinion on the correct threshold between state weakness and state failure that led him to include repression as a characteristic of failed states. Instead, I suggest that he had good reason to do so.

During 2003 and 2004 he repeatedly labelled Iraq under Saddam Hussein's rule a failed state.²⁷ (A designation that most academics, following the above definition, would almost certainly dispute.) In his highly publicized and much criticized speech on global terrorism on 5 March 2004, wherein he outlined his 'international community' doctrine, Blair declared: "From September 11th on, I could see the threat plainly. Here were terrorists prepared to bring about Armageddon. Here were states whose leadership cared for no-one but themselves; were often cruel and tyrannical towards their own people; and who saw WMD as a means of defending themselves against any attempt external or internal to remove them and who, in their chaotic and corrupt state, were in any event porous and irresponsible with neither the will nor capability to prevent terrorists who also hated the West, from exploiting their chaos and corruption."²⁸ In this statement, the definition of a rogue state – tyrannical, isolated, militaristic – is conflated with elements of a failed state – chaos and corruption. The same kind of definitional muddle was evident in July 2003 when Blair tried (unsuccessfully) to get a similar statement urging the international community to intervene in cases of 'state failure' into the final communique of the Progressive Governance Conference, a meeting of centre-left policymakers from several countries.²⁹

What stands out is that Blair only employs the label 'failed state' to refer to either Afghanistan or Iraq. In both cases he was talking about military interventions *a posteriori*. By declaring the countries in question failed states, Blair is constructing a humanitarian argument for waging these two wars: through the military intervention, the plight of millions of civilians had been eased. In both cases, this argument serves to re-legitimize the government's actions.

3.3 Germany

²⁶ Cf. Holsti 1996 and Forrest 2003.

²⁷ Cf. Blair 2003a, 2004a and 2004b.

²⁸ Blair 2003b.

²⁹ Cf. Russell 2003.

Just like the FCO in the United Kingdom, the Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt – AA) has been the driving force in introducing the concept of state failure into German policy discourse. It first appeared in July 2000 when Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer called failed states a “growing problem”³⁰ from a global governance and human rights point of view.

After the September 11th attacks, the connection between terrorist groups and failed states rapidly entered AA rhetoric. Fischer was quick to denounce failed states as threats to peace and security: “Zones of political and social disorder are not merely a regional problem and a human tragedy, rather an existential threat to world peace emanates from these hotspots, these ‘black holes’ of global politics.”³¹ The AA, however, was slower to adapt than its chief executive: in two documents published 2002, failed states are presented as nothing more than foreign policy challenges with no direct bearing on German security.³²

Only in early 2004 was state failure truly integrated into the security calculus of the AA administration. Nowadays, failed states are thought of as structural variables, facilitating the spread of a number of unwelcome phenomena, such as terror, migration and organized crime. However, since these problems are weighted differently, with only terrorism being a truly securitized issue, the discursive context of state failure changes accordingly, it being presented as an existential threat one time and a – somewhat less threatening – ‘problem for European security’ the next.³³

Most statements emphasize that military measures can only be part of the solution (if at all): “Above and beyond fighting terrorism with military means, is it not necessary to prevent terrorism from developing in failed states? Should we not greatly step up our economic, social and political commitment in order to avoid having failing states in the first place, those ‘black holes’ of statehood? Is not nation-building a key issue? Or increased assistance for the poor countries?”³⁴ On many occasions, Fischer has called for a comprehensive, international effort to tackle failed states, preferably in a preventive manner.³⁵

This emphasis on multilateral approaches with a holistic understanding of conflict reflects underlying German attitudes regarding the use of force. The German electorate still sees the exercise of military power very sceptically, to say the least, so pointing out the humanitarian dimensions of a problem and the plight of the affected population is a very important tool for

³⁰ Fischer 2000. [Translation: D.L.] Also see Herterich 2000.

³¹ Fischer 2002a. Also see Fischer 2001b.

³² Cf. Pleuger 2002 and Auswärtiges Amt 2002.

³³ For an example of the first, see Auswärtiges Amt 2004a, the latter, see Auswärtiges Amt 2004b.

³⁴ Fischer 2002b. Also see Fischer 2002c and Volmer 2002.

³⁵ Cf. Fischer 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002c and 2003.

generating public support. Similarly, the focus on multilateral action satisfies the German urge not to be seen as overly assertive on the international stage.

Therefore it comes at no surprise that the Federal Ministry of Defence (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung – BmVG) is a latecomer to the state failure debate – in the BmVG’s official publications, the concept does not show up at all. Nevertheless, Defence Minister Peter Struck has touched upon the topic several times, beginning in early 2003. In his opinion, the strategic environment has become a lot more complex due to international terrorism, WMD proliferation and the regionalization of conflicts. He, too, is a proponent of the ‘root cause’ model of state failure.³⁶

Another recurring theme in the Minister’s statements is the globalized nature of these threats. Referring to the Bundeswehr’s participation in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, Struck has coined the phrase that “it is Germany’s security that is being defended in the Hindu Kush”³⁷ which in turn has prompted criticism from pacifist and conservative groups alike. At the same time, Struck emphasizes that, in a comprehensive strategy, the root causes of conflict ought to be tackled with strategies of development cooperation rather than military means. “A modern security strategy has to span more than just a focus on military capabilities. It needs answers which can do justice to the multiplicity of non-military causes of violence and instability.”³⁸ This idea of multidimensional security and a limited role of the armed forces in its achievement again is a reflection of German attitudes towards military action. Insofar, it ties in well with the AA’s position.

In contrast to the sometimes cautious and nuanced statements regarding failed states made by AA and BmVG officials, the Federal Chancellor (Bundeskanzler), Gerhard Schröder, undertook clear securitizing moves with regard to state failure: “Failed states, in which governments are unable or unwilling to guarantee the security and the welfare of their citizens, represent one of the biggest threats of our time.”³⁹

To sum up, the German position is substantially more complex than the UK’s, as it ties the failed state phenomenon into a larger context of globalization and underdevelopment. In effect, security has been added to the list of issues attached to failed states instead of replacing either humanitarian or developmental concerns. However, this is not necessarily a good thing, as this kind of holistic approach invites policy overload where all kinds of desirable outcomes

³⁶ Cf. Struck 2003.

³⁷ Struck 2004a. He has used this phrase on several other occasions.

³⁸ Struck 2004b. [Translation: D.L.]

³⁹ Schröder 2004. Also see Schröder 2003.

are attached to an undertaking without clear priorities, making achievement of the goals wholly unrealistic.

Furthermore, political analysts criticize that the government has no real understanding of the 'failed state' phenomenon and of the consequences it could have on German security. Stefan Mair, an Africa expert at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (Berlin) contends that German policy on Africa is primarily guided by a "diffuse gut feeling [that] negative developments there might someday have negative consequences for us"⁴⁰. This judgment seems overly harsh, but the sheer comprehensiveness of the German approach has left the government without a viable strategy how to deal with failing states.

3.4 European Union

On 12 December 2003, the heads of state of the European Union's member nations formally adopted the European Security Strategy (ESS) drafted by Javier Solana, the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The ESS defines five key threats to European security: terrorism, WMD proliferation, regional conflict, state failure and organized crime. The ESS also lays out the relationships between these diverse threats. For example, "(c)ollapse of the state can be associated with obvious threats, such as organized crime or terrorism. State Failure is an alarming phenomenon, that undermines global governance, and adds to regional instability."⁴¹ The ESS calls for a more proactive and multidimensional security policy: "Our traditional concept of self-defence [...] was based on the threat of invasion. With the new threats, the first line of defence will often be abroad. [...] In contrast to the massive visible threat in the Cold War, none of the new threats is purely military; nor can any be tackled by purely military means."⁴²

The ESS can be considered a snapshot of current thinking on security within European policy circles. Its inclusion of state failure into the list of key threats is indicative of the deep securitization that the term had already experienced. Most of the roots of this securitization lie within the member states. However, the security discourse within the EU itself has been changing post-9/11, too.

In June 2001, Javier Solana considered regional instability to be a danger to the EU's interests, especially in case of geographical proximity, e.g., in the Balkans. In subsequent

⁴⁰ Quoted in: Wolters 2004. [Translation: D.L.]

⁴¹ Solana 2003c: 8-9.

⁴² Solana 2003c: 11-12.

speeches (April and November 2003) he outlines the growing importance of failed states within the security calculus even if he stops short of securitizing the issue.⁴³

But the real driving force behind the securitization of failed states within the EU has not been Solana but External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten. Many times, he has outlined the dangers that failed states pose: “There are examples on every continent, examples whose consequences increasingly preoccupy us. In some cases we are not talking about state-backed terrorism but of terrorist-backed states. Crime, drugs, mayhem spread from the collapsed state to infect its neighbours, a national calamity turns into a regional threat and a global problem. Afghanistan. Somalia. Sudan. Sierra Leone. Colombia. The list unrolls. [...] The international community has *no choice* but to work together to manage and resolve the problems caused by state-failure.”⁴⁴

Patten acknowledges that the policy assessment of state failure has undergone a shift: “the development and humanitarian case” for getting involved in failed states, he says, “has always been there”, but today they are an issue “to which we must devote more time, more political energy, and more money.”⁴⁵ Patten champions the notion that failed states are the breeding grounds of a host of international problems, from terrorism to refugees, the drug trade, regional instability, organized crime, money laundering and people smuggling (what he terms ‘the dark side of globalization’). This is indicative of EU thinking which considers state failure (along with regional conflicts) as “sources of threats rather than threats themselves”⁴⁶. The ESS has been widely endorsed among member states of the EU, but it is too early to tell what effect its threat assessment will have on national security discourses.

3.5 Australia

In contrast to the United Kingdom, Germany and the European Union, the Australian discourse on state failure was not so much influenced by September 11th, but by the Solomon Islands intervention in late 2003. In the period of time between September 2001 and March 2003, neither the Prime Minister nor the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) mentioned the link between terrorism and failed states, although by then this was almost dogma within the international security community. Twice during this period, Minister for Defence Robert Hill alluded to the connection, but only in rather unclear terms.⁴⁷ It was only

⁴³ Cf. Solana 2001, 2003a and 2003b. As regards European policy before September 11th, cf. Holm 2001.

⁴⁴ Patten 2001a. Emphasis in the original. Also see Patten 2002.

⁴⁵ Patten 2001b.

⁴⁶ Research for a Secure Europe 2004: 18, Fn. 9.

⁴⁷ Cf. Hill 2002 and 2003.

when the assistance mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was publicly debated that state failure finally entered the Australian security discourse.

Within the DFAT, the change was especially pronounced. Throughout 2002, the Department and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, hardly ever used the term ‘failed state’, and if it was mentioned, it was portrayed as a humanitarian and developmental problem. The connection to terror was not once made.⁴⁸ This ‘pre-Solomon Islands’ phase was further characterized by a manifest unwillingness to get involved too much into the affairs of the South Pacific island states. This attitude is especially visible in Downer’s now famous January 2003 article where he stated: “Australia is not about to recolonize the South Pacific, nor should it. [...] Sending in troops to occupy Solomon Islands would be folly in the extreme.”⁴⁹

In contrast, several months later, as the political process that would later lead to RAMSI got under way (starting in early June 2003), Downer began to argue in favor of more regional engagement, growing ever more assertive over time, culminating in his statement to the UN General Assembly in September 2003 that “(o)ld shibboleths – such as the excessive homage to sovereignty even at the expense of the preservation of humanity and human values – should not constrain us.”⁵⁰

Two other shifts are noticeable in Downer’s rhetoric. Firstly, he started to connect failed states to terrorism and secondly, he began to refer to Solomon Islands (and Solomon Islands only) as a failing or failed state. What is more, he made it clear that he considered a case like Solomon Islands to be a threat to Australian security, even though – as he admitted – there was no known terrorist group operating out of the country. What worried him was the potential of the country to serve as a haven for “money launderers, drug traffickers, people traffickers, possible even terrorists. It’s an environment which can be exploited by those types of people.”⁵¹

Within the DFAT, the application of the ‘failed state’ label followed (and still follows) a clear pattern. From mid-2003 onwards Downer used the term exclusively in reference to Solomon Islands, with one visible exception: in an interview in early April 2004, during the debate about an early withdrawal of Australian troops from Iraq, he said: “The idea here that the international community, including Australia, should cut and run from Iraq and leave it as

⁴⁸ Cf. Downer 2002a and 2002b.

⁴⁹ Downer 2003a. Also see DFAT 2003: 93.

⁵⁰ Downer 2003f. Also see Downer 2003b.

⁵¹ Downer 2003c. Also see Downer 2003d.

a failed state, to become a haven for terrorists, is a foolish idea, is a very unwise idea.” This statement is repeated no less than four times, and another four times in other interviews.⁵²

A similar practice shows up in the statements made by the Prime Minister, John Howard. He, too, is visibly reluctant to speak of other specific countries in the region as failed states. During several interviews, he is asked how the Solomon Islands intervention might serve as a precedent for more active involvement in other countries in the region. In general, Howard tries to avoid a direct answer to these questions: “I don’t want to start talking about Papua New Guinea’s future except to make this comment – that we have a long history of entwinement with that country. And it was once administered by Australia and our future will always be, in a sense, a shared future and we naturally have responsibilities towards the people of that country and the rest of the world sees us as having responsibilities towards that country.”⁵³

I do not want to go into the reasons for this policy shift that caused the government to reverse its decision regarding intervention in Solomon Islands. This debate has been covered elsewhere.⁵⁴ I agree with Kabutaulaka that the intervention has to be seen against the backdrop of the dominant global security discourse – fears of terrorism gaining a foothold so close to Australia certainly were an important factor. In addition to this, the government has utilized elements from the global security discourse, namely, the idea of state failure as a serious threat, to help legitimize the Solomon Islands intervention. It should be noted that the Australian government does not lightly label countries ‘failed states’. As in the United Kingdom, the notion is only applied to those countries where Australia has intervened militarily.

Another interesting case is Papua New Guinea (PNG) where Australia has increased its financial commitment and plans to deploy police and public servants in order to support the failing state infrastructure. Here, Howard and Downer both made several unclear statements with Howard once calling PNG “fragile” and Downer warning that the country would fail if international aid were withdrawn.⁵⁵ I suggest that this case fits into the broader pattern, since Australia has so far stopped short of a military intervention in PNG. Accordingly, more circumspect language was called for.

One important reason for this reluctance to extend the ‘failed state’ label to other countries in the region is the rising level of expectations within the region. RAMSI has been such an

⁵² Downer 2004a. Also see Downer 2004b and 2004c.

⁵³ Howard 2003a. Also see Howard 2003b and 2003c.

⁵⁴ Cf. McDougall 2004, Kabutaulaka 2004 and Dinnen 2004.

⁵⁵ Howard 2004. Cf. Downer 2003e.

unanticipated success that the Australian government is trying hard not to have its military interventions being seen as a panacea to all of the South Pacific's problems.

4. CONCLUSION

Has state failure become securitized? Which countries is it applied to and why? And what effect did this have on politics? I will try to answer these three questions.

Regarding the securitization hypothesis, I would suggest that it has been confirmed. However, one significant problem remains: sometimes state failure *as such* was considered a threat, sometimes 'failed state' was a label that was attached to whatever state a government deemed unsavoury. (The second one was, as I argued above, very much the case in Tony Blair's use of the term.) The two usages of the term are not easy to separate.

Nevertheless, I believe that a securitization of state failure has been (and is still) taking place in most Western countries and in global security discourse. In some cases, notably in Germany, this process might not yet be complete.

The study has shown that most governments identify state failure as a root cause or a structural variable behind many of today's transnational problems, such as terrorism, crime or refugee flows.⁵⁶ Understood that way, state failure serves as a concept that ties together several security risks that were formerly understood as phenomena more or less distinct from one another. This enables governments to formulate integrated policy approaches tackling these risks and their causes holistically and contributes to a more nuanced understanding. However, since the empirical link between failed states and terrorism (and, to a lesser degree, organized crime) appears to be much weaker than generally thought (see above), these policies and strategies might turn out to be only of questionable value.

I have set out the proposition that there are certain patterns in how the label 'failed state' is being applied. In the discourse within the UK and Australia, I found it striking that countries are only being called 'failed states' when an intervention in these countries is being prepared and has recently taken place. The failure of the state seems to function as a powerful argument in favor of military intervention, either with (Solomon Islands) or without (Afghanistan) the consent of the affected government.

This development has lead some commentators to decry a new global imperialism or neo-colonialism under the guise of humanitarian assistance and international security. With a sufficiently flexible definition of failure, it is alleged, almost all underdeveloped states could become legitimate victims of intervention. "In the new theory of failed states, the

⁵⁶ For a similar interpretation cf. Dorff 2002.

‘international community’, or a set of countries, or even a single country, can intervene in another country, including to change its government, if that country is a failed state.”⁵⁷ This statement goes too far in its attempt deligitimize the ‘failed states’ discourse, but, recalling the practice by the British and the Australian governments, it is not totally off the mark. Additionally, this kind of thinking has found an audience in many developing countries. The recent regime change in Haiti was a very good example of how these competing interpretations collide. While the United States and France argued that by removing President Bertrand Aristide from office, they had in fact prevented an impending collapse of the state, the Carribean Community countries have since refused to accept the new government, alleging that the major powers had effectively staged a coup.

However, some governments have already adapted to the new kind of security setting that they operate in. The Solomon Islands government, for example, managed to secure Australian and regional assistance by cloaking itself in the mantle of the ‘failed state’ – help that had been refused only three years earlier in a similar domestic situation.

The government of East Timor is employing a different strategy in the ongoing dispute with Australia about the correct demarcation of the two countries’ maritime boundary. If Australia would not accede to its tiny neighbor’s demands for a bigger share of the oil field straddling the current boundary, East Timor would become a failed state, with all the consequences that might entail. East Timor’s President Xanana Gusmao said: “It makes the difference to our future. We would not like to be a failed state. Without all this we will be another Haiti, another Liberia, another Solomon Islands, and we do not want that”⁵⁸. Now that weakness has become a concern for international security, East Timor is using it as a bargaining chip.

This goes to show that the change within the discourse and the practice of international security has not only opened up new policy opportunities for the bigger powers but also for the smaller and poorer countries. In my view, international norms are beginning to change in favor of allowing international intervention in failing states. At the same time, similar norms are developing that give developed countries not only the possibility but the obligation to intervene in these cases. This would explain Australia’s cautiousness in applying the ‘failed state’ label which is reminiscent of U.S. President Bill Clinton’s order to members of his administration not to use the term ‘genocide’ when referring to Rwanda in 1994 so as not to create a moral obligation for the United States to intervene.

⁵⁷ Khor 2002. Also see Fituni 2004.

⁵⁸ Quoted in: Marks 2004.

On the one hand, it is to be welcomed that failed states receive more international attention these days. On the other hand, there is a danger that the term 'failed states' might become more and more politicized in a way reminiscent of the label 'rogue state', implying all kinds of bad things about a country and its government.

Therefore, desecuritization⁵⁹ of state failure would certainly be the best route to take. However, the term is so polarized already that it seems too late to hope for a more neutral and academic application of the concept. It remains to be seen whether scholarly discourse will be able to keep its use of the term 'failed state' distinct from the increasingly normative content of the concept in political practice.

⁵⁹ Cf. Waever 1995.

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