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Security Force Assistance and Security Sector Reform



Richard H. Shultz, Jr.
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On the cover. A U.S. Special Operations Forces service member along with 3rd Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide or Rapid Intervention Battalion soldiers demonstrate the proper way to pass hallways and intersections during Close Quarter Battle training during Exercise Silent Warrior 2013 in Bamenda, Cameroon. Photo by Air Force Master Sgt. Larry W. Carpenter, Jr.



*Security Force
Assistance and
Security Sector Reform*

Richard H. Shultz

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Foreword

In this monograph, Dr. Richard Shultz conducts a study of the coming requirements and likely contexts in confronting future security challenges. Specifically, he argues that weak and failing states will play a central role in coming conflicts. More importantly, the ungoverned/alternatively governed spaces within weak and failing states will provide the opportunity for violent extremist organizations (VEOs) to grow and extend their influence. Even more challenging, some states face threats from multiple VEOs operating from ungoverned/alternatively governed areas. As such, Dr. Shultz argues that the failing states represent a challenge not only locally, but as a threat to international security. How this challenge will be overcome is first by recognizing that future threats, generally, will not be state centric, but rather irregular in nature.

Dr. Shultz advocates for not only engagement in these failing states, but to engage as early as possible to prevent the growth and festering of violent extremist organizations which will require larger more costly intervention later. He specifically recognizes the need for an irregular warfare tool to engage early through security sector reform to prevent just such growth. Dr. Shultz systematically addresses five issues in making the case for early engagement in weak and failing states: 1) What are the dimensions of weak and failing states? In what regions are these states clustered? 2) What is the relationship between weak and failing states and ungoverned or undergoverned territory where violent extremist groups may flourish? To what extent do these irregular conflicts coincide with weak and failing states? 3) Are there discernible patterns to post Cold-War and 9/11 irregular conflict? Will intrastate conflicts persist into the 21st century? 4) Which weak and failing states will have an impact on U.S. national security interests? On what basis should the United States determine it is in U.S. national interest to provide security force assistance and security sector reform? 5) What are the tools and capabilities which the Department of Defense needs to assist weak and failing states to be successful against irregular challenges? What does it need to add or develop to that inventory of capabilities?

Dr. Shultz delves into each of the questions to find common logic to support early engagement. Importantly, he identifies the contributions Special

Operations Forces (SOF) can make to a new U.S. security force assistance and security sector reform strategy. While Dr. Shultz recognizes that the future is always a bit uncertain, and the U.S. may again be drawn into a large and costly confrontation against VEOs, he makes a compelling argument that the appropriate tool is SOF through irregular warfare with the intention of early engagement.

Kenneth H. Poole, Ed.D.
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

About the Author

Dr. Richard H. Shultz, Jr., is a professor of international politics at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, where he teaches graduate-level courses in various aspects of international security affairs, internal/transnational conflict and war studies, and intelligence and armed groups. He is also the director of the Fletcher School's International Security Studies Program. The program is dedicated to graduate-level teaching and research on a broad range of conflict, defense, and strategic issues.

In Washington he has served as director of research at the National Strategy Information Center (NSIC) where in 2010 he completed, with NSIC President Roy Godson, a major study focused on Adapting America's Security Paradigm and Security Agenda for 21st century security challenges.

With the assistance from the U.S. Marine Corps, he recently completed an in-depth study analyzing one of what he believes is illustrative of the types of conflicts that will characterize the 21st century security environment—the U.S. Marine Corps' 2004-2008 campaign in Al Anbar Province in Iraq. To complete the research he had access to the records and Iraq oral history collection at the U.S. Marine Corps History Division. The study has been published under the title *The Marines Take Anbar: The Four-Year Fight against Al Qaeda* (Annapolis, MD: The Naval Institute Press, 2013). Recently, the book was reviewed in *The Wall Street Journal*.

His new research project is focused on developing "A U.S. Blueprint for Security Sector Reform (SSR) for the 21st Century." The project focuses on developing a framework for the U.S. that adapts security sector reform (SSR) theory and practice for addressing dysfunctional security sectors of fragile states; examines the state of capabilities across the U.S. government for addressing these challenges; and identifies gaps in those capabilities that need to be filled if the U.S. is to employ SSR as an effective policy tool. The project is a joint effort with Dr. Querine Hanlon of United States Institute of Peace. Support for the project comes from the Smith Richardson Foundation.



He has held three chairs: the Olin Distinguished Professorship of National Security Studies at the U.S. Military Academy, Secretary of the Navy Senior Research Fellow at the U.S. Naval War College, and Brigadier General H. L. Oppenheimer Chair of War-fighting Strategy, U.S. Marine Corps. Since the mid-1980s he has served as a security consultant to various U.S. government departments and agencies concerned with national security affairs. Currently he is Senior Fellow at the Joint Special Operations University and a consultant to the U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Marine Corps.

His other recent books include *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat* (Columbia University Press, 2006; 2009 Paperback Edition) and *The Secret War against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999; 2000 Paperback Edition). His recent articles include: "States in the 21st Century," *Geopolitics, History and International Relations* 4:1 (2012); "A QDR for all Seasons," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Sept. 2010); and "The Sources of Instability in the Twenty-First Century Weak States, Armed Groups, and Irregular Conflict," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (Summer 2011). He authored two recent monographs: *Strategic Culture and Strategic Studies: An Alternative Framework for Assessing Al Qaeda and the Global Jihadi Movement* (JSOU Press, 2012) and *Armed Groups and Irregular Warfare: Adapting Professional Military Education* (National Strategy Information Center, 2009).

Introduction

Over the last several years, notes Stewart Patrick in his recent volume *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security*, weak, failing, and failed states have increasingly come to be seen as significant security challenges by the senior leadership of the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and Department of Defense (DOD). Those officials contend that several fragile states are confronted by an array of fractious and intractable problems that can have important implications for the interests and security of the United States. Some are threatened by violent extremist groups with political agendas, others by potent criminal syndicates. Yet others confront multiple armed groups. These violent non-state actors emerge and mature in weak and failing states.

In 2008, then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asserted that “One of the defining challenges in our world, now and for many years to come, will be to deal with weak and poorly governed states—states that are on the verge of failure, or indeed, states that have already failed.” These conditions “create anarchy, and conflict, and ungoverned space ... where arms traffickers and other transnational actors can operate with impunity, and where terrorists and extremists can gather, plot, and train.”¹

One year later, her successor, Secretary Hillary Clinton, concurred, stating that weak and failing states are “Breeding grounds, not only for the worst abuses of human beings, from mass murder to rapes to indifference toward disease and other terrible calamities, but they are invitations to terrorists to find refuge amidst the chaos.”²

For former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, the challenges posed by weak and failing states were part of a transforming international security environment in which non-state armed groups were mushrooming in number and in their capacity to cause major geopolitical damage in their own territory and beyond through the use of irregular and unconventional means. Secretary Gates advanced this appraisal through his own public discourse, as well as through two *Quadrennial Defense Reviews* (QDR) and other notable DOD directives and initiatives.

For example, in 2008 the secretary described the future conflict environment as one in which “overall, looking ahead, I believe the most persistent

and potentially dangerous threats will come less from ambitious states, than from failing ones that cannot meet the basic needs—much less the aspirations—of their people.”³ In his 2009 *Foreign Affairs* article, he expanded on this theme asserting:

The recent past vividly demonstrated the consequences of failing to address adequately the dangers posed by insurgencies and failing states. Terrorist networks can find sanctuary within the borders of a weak nation and strength within the chaos of social breakdown. The most likely catastrophic threats to the U.S. homeland, for example, that of a U.S. city being poisoned or reduced to rubble by a terrorist attack, are more likely to emanate from failing states than from aggressor states.⁴

Within the Pentagon, the initial recognition of the ascendancy of weak and failing states and irregular conflicts as important security challenges appeared in the 2006 QDR. It was the first step in this diagnosis by the DOD. It stipulated that irregular warfare (IW) was now a vital mission area for the U.S. military, and stressed the need to prepare for it. War in the aftermath of 9/11 was characterized as “irregular in its nature.” Enemies in those fights were depicted as “not traditional conventional military forces.” IW involved indirect and asymmetric forms of attack by non-state actors, and is inherently a protracted struggle, according to the QDR.⁵

On the heels of the 2006 QDR, several manuals, directives, and related activities followed including Pentagon *Directive 3000.07-Irregular Warfare*. Defining IW as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors” taking place “in fragile states,” the directive asserted that “IW is as strategically important as traditional warfare,” and was essential to “maintain capabilities and capacity so that the Department of Defense is as effective in IW as it is in traditional warfare.”⁶

Finally, the 2010 QDR highlights weak states as one part of a complex and uncertain 21st century international security environment that will include threats from states and from violent non-state actors. In the case of the latter, armed groups will “continue to gain influence and capabilities that, during the previous century, remained largely the purview of states.” Moreover, a “shifting operational landscape” and “changing international environment will continue to put pressure on the modern state system [by] increasing the frequency and severity of the challenges associated with chronically fragile

states.” These weak and failing states will provide sanctuaries or safe havens in ungoverned territory within their borders for empowered non-state actors who will have a growing impact on world affairs. The 2010 QDR gives particular attention to “al-Qaeda’s terrorist network.”⁷

To meet the challenges of weak states and the terrorist, insurgent, and criminal challenges that they can foster, the 2010 QDR noted that while there may be cases in the future in which the U.S. will have to engage in “large scale counterinsurgency, stability, and counterterrorism operations,” a more judicious approach is to assist “weak states facing insurgencies, transnational terrorists, or criminal networks” in their early stages when these challenges are emerging. To do so, the 2010 QDR highlights a “range of security cooperation activities [of which] the most dynamic in the coming years will be security force assistance,” but will also include “ministerial-level training missions” to strengthen those security institutions that manage military and police forces.⁸ The latter falls under the rubric of security sector reform (SSR), a capability the U.S. has only recently begun to consider developing.

For then Secretary Gates, the need for an “early intervention” approach was essential, given that he believed “The United States is unlikely to repeat another Iraq or Afghanistan—that is, forced regime change followed by nation building under fire—anytime soon. But that does not mean it may not face similar challenges in a variety of locales.” To head these situations off, Secretary Gates proposed that the U.S. employ “indirect approaches—primarily through building the institutional capacity of partner governments and their security forces—to prevent festering problems from turning into crises that require costly and controversial direct military intervention.” This approach, the secretary concluded, “is arguably as important as, if not more so than, the fighting the United States does itself.”⁹

The objective of this study will be to examine the security predicaments faced by fragile and weak states, the extent to which these situations affect U.S. interests, and the contributions Special Operations Forces (SOF) can make to a new U.S. security force assistance (SFA) and SSR strategy. If the U.S. is to adhere to Secretary Gates’ call to focus on strengthening the capacity and accountability of the security forces and defense ministries of weak governments before incipient irregular threats escalate into “crises that require costly and controversial direct military intervention,” a new policy and strategy is needed. This study begins by presenting the case or rationale for a new policy of early engagement. Chapters 1-3 make the case for why

the U.S. should adopt this policy course of action given today's scarce defense dollars. Having made the policy argument, Chapters 4-5 discuss the dimensions of the strategy for supporting this policy.

1. Dimensions of State Weakness: A Persistent 21st Century Security Challenge

The starting point for determining the extent of SOF involvement in and contribution to future U.S. SFA and defense institution building missions, and the capabilities SOF will need to retain to do so, is an assessment of the weak and fragile state context. Are the above observations by the senior leadership of the DOS and DOD well-founded or overstated? Without that understanding, SOF mission planning at best would be problematic.

Weak states have been the subject of considerable recent academic and public policy attention with several major projects attempting to calculate the factors that contribute to state weakness and incapacity, and the impact this can have on local, regional, and international stability. To gain a better understanding of the extent to which weak states constitute a burgeoning international problem, a review of the findings from one of the most prominent of these analytic assessments will be undertaken. This project has sought over the last number of years to categorize states along a continuum from strong to weak, failing, and failed states, and to identify the principle sources of their strength or weakness. In the 21st century, the world now comprises nearly 200 states. How many of those can be characterized as weak, failing, or failed?

Since 2005, The Failed State Index has sought to answer this question. To do so, it has assessed and categorized states along a strong to weak, failing and failed continuum. Produced annually by The Fund for Peace, the index is globally recognized and utilized. The architects of the index have designed a sophisticated content analysis-based methodology for ranking 177 nations based on their measured levels of stability and institutional capacity.¹⁰ They have also produced in-depth assessments of key countries based on data derived from the index, which is then supplemented by qualitative analysis.

To address the questions posed earlier concerning 1) the dimensions of state weakness, 2) the number of states that can be classified as weak, failing or failed, and 3) the regions in which these states are clustered, the findings from the 2011 *Failed States Index* are highlighted. The index measures the strength or weakness of a state based on data that provides insight into those “social, economic, and political pressures” that affect stability and

institutional capacity. Twelve “conflict risk indicators” are assessed to measure the degree of a state’s stability and institutional capacity during a given year and how susceptible it may be to organized resistance, political violence, and armed conflict.¹¹

Each indicator measures an important social, economic, or political/security dimension of state strength or weakness. The following list contains a brief summation of the parameters of each indicator. Scores from each are summarized into an overall or aggregate rating “on a 1 to 10 scale with 1 being a most stable [state] and 10 being [a state] most at-risk of collapse and violence.” In the annual *Failed State Index* report, each country receives an aggregate score assessing its overall strength or weakness based on these 12 indicators.

An examination of these indicators suggests that while each is an important source of state strength or weakness, certain indicators focus more directly on those precipitating conditions that make a state vulnerable to civil resistance, political violence, or armed insurrection. This is important to note because not every state ranked as weak, failing, or failed is likely to foster a political crisis that generates civil or violent irregular conflict. An understanding of these distinctions would be important in shaping the kinds of assistance programs third parties provide to weak states. To be sure, weak and corrupt institutions contribute to poverty, human suffering, and abysmal development in all weak states. But these conditions of state weakness, in and of themselves, do not generate internal resistance and armed conflict.

Of those indicators that are most likely to foster intrastate conflict, the following appear most relevant. First is that social indicator that measures the degree to which ethnic, religious, or other political/social group grievance is high due to state organized and perpetrated repression of particular societal groups. These conditions, as a review of the patterns of intrastate conflict during the last 25 years discloses, frequently result in prolonged struggles in which violent or non-violent groups challenge the legitimacy and authority of a state’s ruling elites.

CONFLICT ASSESSMENT INDICATORS

Social Indicators

1. Mounting Demographic Pressures. Due to high population density relative to life-sustaining resources, group settlement patterns that affect freedom to

participate in common forms of activity, high growth rates, and impact natural disasters, epidemics, and environmental hazards.

2. Massive Movement of Refugees or Internally-Displaced Persons. Due to forced uprooting of large communities as a result of random or targeted violence and/or repression that spiral into larger humanitarian and security problems.

3. Vengeance-Seeking Group Grievance. Due to specific groups singled out for institutionalized political exclusion, persecution, or repression which may include atrocities committed with impunity.

4. Chronic and Sustained Human Flight. Voluntary emigration of “the middle class,” particularly economically productive segments of the population. “Brain drain” of professionals, intellectuals, and political dissidents fearing persecution or repression.

Economic Indicators

5. Uneven Economic Development. Group-based inequality, or perceived inequality, in education and economic status. Group-based impoverishment as measured by poverty levels.

6. Poverty and Sharp Economic Decline. Pattern of economic decline as a whole as measured by per capita income, gross national product, debt, poverty levels, business failures, and growth of illicit activities.

Political/Security Indicators

7. Legitimacy of the State. Massive and endemic corruption or profiteering by ruling elites who resist transparency and accountability. Widespread loss of popular confidence in state institutions.

8. Progressive Deterioration of Public Services. Disappearance of basic state functions including failure to protect citizens from violence and to provide essential services. State functions narrows to those agencies that serve the ruling elites, such as the security apparatus.

9. Violation of Human Rights and Rule of Law. Outbreak of politically inspired violence against innocent civilians. Rising number of political prisoners or dissidents who are denied due process. Widespread abuse of legal, political, and social rights, including those of individuals, groups, and institutions.

10. Security Apparatus. Emergence of praetorian guards, secret intelligence units, or other irregular security forces loyal to a leader that operate with impunity. Emergence of state-supported private militias that terrorize political opponents. Armed resistance to the governing authority, violent uprisings and insurgencies, proliferation of armed groups that challenge the state’s monopoly of the use of force.

11. Rise of Factionalized Elites. Fragmentation of ruling elites and state institutions along identity lines. Absence of legitimate leadership widely accepted as representing the entire citizenry.

12. Intervention of External Actor. Military or paramilitary engagement in the internal affairs of the state by outside armies or other entities that affect the internal balance of power or the resolution of conflict. Economic intervention by outside powers, including multilateral organizations.

Other political/security indicators likewise contribute to the context in which intrastate instability takes place. These include state security forces that on behalf of unaccountable elites operate with impunity, violate human rights, and foster violent uprisings and the proliferation of armed groups. Massive and endemic corruption by ruling elites also contributes to the conditions in which other kinds of intrastate challenges emerge. These include those from organized criminal syndicates who establish a nexus with the ruling elites of corrupt regimes. Alternatively, these conditions may also spawn non-violent civil resistance movements like those that emerged in Egypt, Tunisia, and initially in Syria during the Arab Spring.

The 2011 *Failed States Index* highlights this context, providing an analytic lens through which to gain an understanding of the conditions and sources of instability in weak, failing, and failed states. What the report finds is that of the 177 states evaluated, 108 can be classified as weak, very weak, failing, or failed. These states, to varying degrees, are not able to maintain control over the territory within their official borders, do not retain a monopoly over the use of force within that territory, are unable to perform core governmental functions beginning with the security of their citizens, and are plagued by corrupt and moribund institutions, poverty, the violation of human rights, and disregard for the rule of law. These are chronic problems that are not easily reversed.

Of the states assessed, 13 were classified as failing or failed. And of these, seven—Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Yemen—have been plagued by prolonged irregular conflict. This was generated by widespread internal repression carried out by state security services or state-supported private militias, violent armed groups challenging state authority and/or one another, and other illicit actors including criminal syndicates and radical Islamists vying for local control. These developments often contribute to regional instability because of the spillover of violence and illicit activities.

The other six failing states—Chad, Haiti, Zimbabwe, the Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea—while beset by grave humanitarian crises due to weak and corrupt government institutions and practices, are not presently immersed in violent internal wars like their seven counterparts. Therefore, they pose a different set of security challenges. However, in the case of the Central African Republic this has recently changed with the outbreak of violence in December 2012 between the government and a coalition of rebel forces that by March 2013 took control of the presidential palace. In April, a transitional council was established. But the events since December have seriously exacerbated the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, and insecurity is rife as a direct consequence of the violence.

The 2011 index classifies another 22 states as very weak. These states likewise suffer from governments with little legitimacy. Several factors contribute to this including a chronic lack of representativeness; massive corruption and illicit activities; unaccountable security services; and severe population and demographic challenges due to an inability or unwillingness on the part of government to revive near non-existent public services (health, sanitation, education).

Several of these very weak states are also either directly or indirectly affected by irregular conflict challenges which can have implications for regional and international security. Here three examples are highlighted—Nigeria, Guinea Bissau, and Kenya. Of these, Nigeria, situated at number 14 on the 2011 index, faces the most serious intrastate threats from an array of violent armed groups.

Of the 12 indicators of state weakness, Nigeria scores highest on group grievance and related political/security factors due to serious inter-faith challenges between north and south, which are made worse by poverty, unemployment, and the unequal distribution of oil revenues. This has led to the escalation of violence by Boko Haram, which in 2010 began launching bloody attacks in the south as well in the north. Over the last three years the group has killed over 1,000 Nigerians, mostly civilians. A self-proclaimed Salafi Jihad group, it poses a major terrorist threat to Nigeria and possibility to the region because some of its factions have embraced and aligned with the global jihadist ideology of al-Qaeda. Several other armed groups are active in the southern oil producing region of Nigeria, most notably the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). It has carried out attacks on petroleum operations both on and off shore, engaging in sabotage, theft,

guerrilla operations, and kidnapping. A major oil producer, instability in Nigeria has regional and international implications.

A second very weak state whose internal challenges have implications for security and stability in the region in which it is located is Guinea Bissau, ranked number 19 in the 2011 index. Located in West Africa, it is a gateway for illicit actors that operate north into the Maghreb states of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, and the disputed area of the Western Sahara. Since it gained independence in 1974, Guinea Bissau has been racked by military coups, most recently one in April 2012 that prevented the second round of presidential elections from taking place. One of the poorest countries in Africa, with high levels of corruption and little institutional capacity outside repressive security services, it has become an important port of entry for Latin American drug cartels that traffic cocaine north to Europe. The nexus between criminal syndicates and local elites is very strong. With a large archipelago and maritime space but no navy to control it, anemic police and judicial institutions, a near-total absence of the rule of law, and armed forces benefiting from engagement in the drug trade, Guinea Bissau has become a major security challenge for the region. This is due to linkages that are being forged between drug traffickers and extremist groups in the north, most importantly al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Finally, in East Africa, in addition to the failed state of Somalia, the 2011 index ranks Kenya at number 16 as a very weak state. A key factor contributing to Kenya's high ranking is a long standing history of ethnic divisions that have long been a source of internal violence and instability, most recently manifesting itself in the disputed presidential election of 2007. More than 1,500 died as a result of that violence and over one quarter of a million were displaced. Also fostering state weakness in Kenya is uneven development and corruption, which are reflected in the economic indicators of the index. Finally, undermining Kenya's stability is the border it shares with Somalia and the increasing number of refugees who cross that border. There are now large Somali enclaves in Kenya to include one in the Eastleigh district of Nairobi. This is now seen as a security threat by the Kenyan army and police because many of these refugees are armed. Kenya has different illicit actors operating across its territory as well to include those involved in international drug smuggling and money laundering. Consequently, Kenya, which was for a long time considered an anchor of stability in East Africa,

has over the last several years faced serious internal and regional security challenges. However, the recent elections, which were not marred by the violence of 2007, and a growing economy which has generated rising foreign direct investment, among related indicators, suggest that the situation inside Kenya is improving.

Beyond these 13 failing and 22 very weak states, the 2011 index identified another 73 states as weak. These include both democratic and authoritarian variations. Of the former, weak democracies generally tend to be new democracies that are in varying stages of transition.¹² They are part of what Sam Huntington called the third wave of democracy.¹³ This began in Latin America in the 1980s and went global with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. By the end of the 20th century there were, according to Larry Diamond, over 100 strong and weak democracies.¹⁴

Weak democracies may aspire to become liberal democracies, ones that “protect the civil rights and political liberties of their citizens and have a high degree of the rule of law.” But most have not reached this position. “Some do not uphold high standards of the rule of law or apply it inconsistently for only a portion of their populations. Others fail to protect civil liberties” and therefore “do not yet enjoy the full consent of all sectors of their populations.”¹⁵ As a result, they may be challenged by armed groups who undermine fundamental security and even jeopardize the continued existence of the regime. Examples include Colombia, Mexico, Lebanon, and the Philippines.

These examples withstanding, the majority of the 73 weak states in 2010 did not face internal or cross-border security challenges from violent armed groups that rose to this level. That said, several of them, due to unrepresentative and authoritarian elites, serious levels of corruption, the presence of illicit actors, unaccountable security institutions and weak public services, suffered from acute capacity gaps that have the potential to generate violent and/or nonviolent opposition groups and movements.

And this is precisely what happened in six states that are part of the Arab Spring uprising. Only one of those six—Yemen—was in the very weak or failing state category with armed groups already operating. Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria, ranked among the 73 weak states identified in the 2011 index, had no such instability. The same was true of the other two—Libya and Bahrain.

Nevertheless, three of these six states experienced regime change—Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. And two others—Syria and Yemen—remain embroiled in violent internal wars. Only Bahrain managed to suppress—at least temporarily—the challenge to its authority.

An unpacking of the aggregate scores for these states, as the 2011 index report notes, “does put the events in these countries into context” and sheds light on the preconditions or underlying sources of instability that helped trigger the Arab Spring uprising.¹⁶ In the cases of Egypt, Syria, Libya and Tunisia, their highest scores were those individual indicators that measure corruption and lack of representativeness, violation of human rights and the rule of law, and elite fragmentation. And in the case of Egypt and Syria, these were coupled with equally high scores on group grievances, making these two countries, in particular, potential candidates for the outbreak of instability.

However, in the case of Libya and Tunisia, the scores on group grievance were lower. But insurrection still happened. In the case of Libya, this low score on group grievance may be explained by the effectiveness of the security services which kept those who had considerable grievances with the regime, as the subsequent revolt revealed, muted in 2010. The same appears to have been the case in Tunisia.

Among these states, Bahrain would appear to be the outlier, with a ranking 129 on the 2011 index. In other words, it was not considered a weak state. But on the indicators of state legitimacy and representativeness, as well as group grievance, Bahrain scored fairly high. What this suggests is that it likewise was a potential candidate for the outbreak of instability.

In sum, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and to a lesser extent Bahrain, all had political areas of weakness, as measured by the *Failed State Index*, that made these states vulnerable to political challenges by violent and nonviolent groups and movements. But it took the actions of a Tunisian fruit vendor who set himself on fire on 17 December 2010, protesting his mistreatment by unaccountable municipal officials, to kindle the Arab Spring. This event served as a precipitant or catalyst that led to the Tunisian revolt which quickly toppled the 23-year autocratic rule of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. It also incited demonstrations and resistance in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Bahrain.

The Arab Spring turned the Middle East and North Africa upside down, and the final outcome is far from in view. In addition to Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and Bahrain, several other states in the region, have similar internal areas of weakness that could make them vulnerable to similar violent or nonviolent civil resistance challenges.

Beyond the Middle East and North Africa, several other regions are likewise composed of states that rank very high on the 2011 *Failed States Index*, making those regions susceptible to the outbreak of civil resistance, political violence, or armed insurrection. Of these, two regions in particular stand out: South Asia and East Africa. Based on the 2011 index, each has several states in the very weak and failing categories.

In the case of South Asia, in 2010 it had the single highest aggregate regional index score. Six of its states—Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Iran—were in the very weak and failing categories. In East Africa five states—Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda—likewise were ranked as very weak or failing.

Finally, three other regions to include West, Southern, and Central Africa, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, all are populated by weak and very weak states, according to the 2011 *Failed State Index*. Ironically, the Middle East and North Africa, which because of the Arab Spring is seen by pundits as the cockpit of insurrection and instability, actually was ranked lower than these five regions in terms of state weakness.

The *Failed State Index* provides a macro level assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of 21st century states. What the 2011 appraisal finds, as reported above, is that weak, very weak, and failing states constitute a serious global challenge for the international community today and into the future. The following passage from that report highlights why this is seen to be the case: the “pressures on one fragile state can have serious repercussions not only for that state itself and its people, but also for its neighbors and other states halfway across the globe.”¹⁷ This is particularly the case when a weak state’s performance gaps, political tensions, and dysfunctional policies deteriorate into internal conflict and violence. This violence can spill over and spread outside the weak state, especially if internal conflict fosters transnational security threats that bring instability to the region in which it is located and beyond.

The *Failed State Index* is not alone in such an assessment. Rather, it is illustrative of a considerable amount of research and analysis over the last decade that has resulted in similar findings.¹⁸ Moreover, these assessments generally agree that this environment, characterized by a large number of weak, very weak, and failing states will not wane any time soon. A decade into the 21st century, a pattern of irregular conflict can be clearly discerned. Understanding these trends is critical for the U.S. as these new security challenges are likely to persist well into the next decade of the 21st century.

2. Ungoverned/Alternatively Governed Territory

Following 9/11, an important factor frequently posited as both facilitating intrastate conflict within weak, very weak, and failing states, as well causing its regional spillover, was the access by armed groups to ungoverned territory within weak states' borders. Such territory could be exploited as a safe haven in which indigenous armed groups evolve and mature. It could also be exploited by transnational extremists and international criminal enterprises who from these bases pose threats to regional stability and beyond.

Geographical areas within the borders of weak states where government has diminished presence and where insurgents or other armed groups establish operational bases are not new. The starting point that Mao Zedong designated to initiate his classic strategy of protracted guerrilla warfare was to exploit remote territory as a base for organizing insurgent forces. Likewise, guerrillas in Latin America in the 1960s, following the strategy of the Cuban revolution, all dashed off to the mountains in hopes of emulating it. But few found success, and in the 1970s, Latin American revolutionaries refocused on urban terrain as an alternative, seeking to exploit the anonymity of cities.

In the 1990s, weak and failing states sparked growing international concern, especially when they devolved into humanitarian crises, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. But little attention was paid to assessing the bases from which armed groups involved in those calamities operated.

Sanctuaries and Safe Havens

Concern over sanctuaries and safe havens changed in the aftermath of 9/11 for U.S. policymakers. Consider the Bush administration's 2002 *National Security Strategy*. It warned that the U.S. would not "allow terrorists to develop new home bases ... We will seek to deny them sanctuary at every turn ... The events of September 11, 2001 taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states ... [because] poverty, weak institutions, and corruption make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders."¹⁹ Subsequent *National Security Strategy* documents in 2006 and 2010 concurred.

In an assessment of national security threats facing the U.S. in 2003 and those on the horizon in 2004, Defense Intelligence Agency director Vice Admiral Lowell Jacoby expressed similar apprehension: “We are increasingly concerned over ‘Ungoverned Spaces,’ defined as geographic areas where governments do not exercise control. Terrorist groups and narco-traffickers use these areas as sanctuaries to train, plan and organize, relatively free from interference ... I believe these areas will play an increasingly important role in the War on Terrorism as al-Qaeda, its associated groups, and other terrorist organizations use these areas as bases for operations.”²⁰ The Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, in his 2003 assessment of worldwide threats, likewise cautioned that in “the world’s vast stretches of ungoverned areas—lawless zones, veritable ‘no man’s lands’ like some areas along the Afghan-Pakistani border—extremist movements find shelter and can win the breathing space to grow.”²¹ Other senior officials from the administration concurred with these estimates, including Richard Haas, director of Policy Planning at the DOS.²²

In 2003, initial analytic efforts from within the U.S. government attempted to delineate the features of ungoverned territory and to identify where it was located. For example, the National Intelligence Council produced “Possible Remote Havens for Terrorist and other Illicit Activity.” These potential sanctuaries were said to be in the world’s most desolate areas and to be “characterized by rugged terrain, thick vegetation cover, and suitable distance” from the security forces of government. International terrorists and other illicit actors were said to be “running rampant in many of these areas.” The study asserted that “international terrorist groups occupied chunks of remote territory in more than 20 countries,” while “more than 40 insurgencies were under way in remote parts of at least 20 countries.” And criminal enterprises “used such territory to skirt government authority.”²³

Employing geospatial modeling, a number of topographical maps were included to highlight states and regions with such territory. What was clear from these and other early descriptions, however, was the fact that understanding of ungoverned territory and safe havens was in its embryonic stage and lacked analytic nuance. While the areas assessed covered considerable remote territory and in some of those locations, various kinds of armed groups were exploiting governance and security gaps, missing were the details of what each had in common and how they differed. Moreover, there was little recognition that ungoverned territory could take more than

one form and present different kinds of security challenges. There was little consideration given to the possibility that urban terrain likewise could contain areas within it where governance and security were in sharp decline or nonexistent. That these areas could provide opportunities for illicit actors was not discerned.

It soon became apparent that ungoverned territory was proving to be a more complicated and nuanced matter than initially portrayed in the public comments of government officials as well as in early analytic assessments. There was no single prototype of ungoverned territory but different variations of it. Likewise, the kinds of safe havens that ungoverned territory provided within weak states for both licit and illicit groups to exploit also varied considerably.

Variations in Ungoverned Territory

Recognition of this complexity and its security implications began to be addressed in DOD-sponsored assessments appearing in 2007, followed by subsequent academic research efforts. With respect to the former, the *Final Report of the Ungoverned Areas Project* (hereafter the Lamb Report), prepared for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and the Rand Corporation's *Ungoverned Territories* project, are illustrative of how analytic inquiry and more nuanced understanding evolved. Each found that "where the state's presence is limited or largely absent, other non-state actors, both licit and illicit, will often seek to fill the void." This was not uncommon in today's world, each study noted, in light of the number of weak states that could "enable illicit actors to operate with impunity or evade detection or capture."²⁴ However, whether this was the case depended on the "circumstances that give rise to absent or ineffective governance."²⁵

Both assessments and subsequent ones sought to more concisely define the dimensions of ungoverned territory and to identify its different subtypes. While the focus of each was on ungoverned territory within fragile states, it should be noted that each also found that ungoverned spaces could also exist in developed countries as well. This included "Western liberal democracies, where illicit actors sometimes take advantage of 'blind spots' in governance capacity and political will, pockets of social discontent, geographical remoteness, or overcrowding" within large cities.²⁶ Within the United States, for example, ungoverned space can be found in several major cities where illicit

gangs, some of which are part of trafficking networks extending through Mexico into Central America, take advantage of such blind spots.

However, it was within weak and failing states that a larger number of non-state armed groups could be found taking advantage of declining government presence to establish safe havens to carry out illicit activities. Within these states, the Rand study identified three categories or subtypes of ungoverned territory—abdicated, incomplete, and contested—based on the extent to which state control was receding. The Lamb Report proposed a five-category typology—ungoverned, under-governed, misgoverned, contested, and exploitable areas. Other specialists devised yet other categorizations.²⁷ These delineations represented important efforts to distinguish various types of ungoverned territory within fragile states by specifying their distinctive characteristics.

As highlighted below, what differentiates each subtype from one another is the extent to which “the central government is unable or unwilling to extend control, effectively govern, or exert influence over the local population,” and where other actors, both licit or illicit, likewise do not have effective control, “due to inadequate capacity, insufficient political will, gaps in legitimacy, [or] the presence of political competition and conflict.”²⁸ For the purposes of this study, ungoverned territory in fragile states is divided into four subtypes—abdicated, incomplete or under-governed, contested, and exploitable areas.

Abdicated areas are present in weak or failing states when government has either given up or lost its capacity and political will to execute “governance functions.” The state’s institutions have either collapsed or withdrawn, and with them has gone the provision of security and other core public goods for the population. “All such ungoverned areas have the potential to become comprehensive safe havens,” according to the Lamb study, and many are exploited by indigenous and transnational non-state armed actors. For example, of the 13 states classified at the apex of the 2011 *Failed State Index*, each contains significant swathes of abdicated or ungoverned territory, with Somalia leading the way and Yemen not far behind. Moreover, of the 13 states, ungoverned areas in 7 of them—Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Yemen—have been exploited by indigenous armed groups, as well as by illicit transnational actors including criminal syndicates and radical Islamists.

Incomplete or under-governed areas are regions where a state has some hold over its territory, but is deficient in ability to maintain strong and fully competent authority because of a lack of the “resources and capacity to do so.”²⁹ While such governments have a degree of presence, competing non-state actors challenge their reach, taking advantage of the situation to exploit governance and authority gaps. All such areas “have the potential to become partial safe havens,” notes the Lamb report, adding that at the present time, many of the safe havens of concern to the U.S. government “are in under-governed areas that have been exploited by transnational illicit extremists.” But not all under-governed areas are exploited as safe havens by illicit

non-state actors.³⁰ Rather, indigenous groups to include tribes and clans may seek to fill the governance gap. In the Afghan-Pakistan border region, both types of non-state actors—indigenous and transnational—are attempting to do so. In other areas such as the 600-mile border between Mexico and

While such governments have a degree of presence, competing non-state actors challenge their reach, taking advantage of the situation to exploit governance and authority gaps.

Guatemala, criminal cartels and gangs control considerable portions of the territory and the contraband that passes through it. The presence of border security forces is very limited with little capacity to stop the smuggling of people, drugs, and weapons that transit through illegal networks on the way to Mexico and the United States. And where they are present, border police often have either been corrupted or coerced by powerful criminal organizations. A porous border likewise exists between Venezuela and Colombia, and various armed groups have vied for control of the smuggling networks and illicit economy that dominates that region.

Contested areas are those places where indigenous groups “refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the government’s rule and pledge loyalty to some other form of social organization, such as an insurgent movement, a tribe or clan, or other identity group.”³¹ These non-state actors seek to facilitate arrangements with the local population by “performing some of the missing governance functions.” For example, “extremists may become the primary providers of education or social services as a way to spread their ideology and win popular support,” while other types of armed groups seek “to become the primary providers of security in an area.”³² The former does so to realize aspirations of independence such as insurgent and secessionist

movements. Examples include Islamists in the Mindanao region of the Philippines and separatists in Chechnya. Criminal organizations, on the other hand, seek to profit from illegal activities but do not have political aspirations. They only want to keep the state from interfering. Criminal syndicates in Mexico and Colombia are illustrative, as are criminal militias in several of the very weak states of Central and West Africa.

Whereas abdicated, under-governed and contested territory all involves physical spaces within fragile states, this final category—exploitable areas—does not. It constitutes the virtual area of the Internet and cyberspace. As with its three counterparts, it can “enable illicit actors to operate while evading detection or capture,” but it “exists not as a physically contiguous space ... but as a network.”³³ Non-state armed groups can exploit virtual space for operational, financial, or informational purposes. For example, operationally it has allowed actors like al-Qaeda to transform how they organize and fight. In Iraq, their underground apparatus was not a hierarchical but a horizontal collection of sometimes connected but often autonomous nodes that were joined together by information technologies. At that time, off-the-shelf information technology utilized by al-Qaeda to take advantage of virtual space included cellular phones and Internet communications through email and websites. These facilitated their deadly operations in ways different from those hierarchical armed groups that challenged states during the Cold War. International criminal syndicates likewise have taken advantage of virtual space to establish illicit financial networks.

While delineating the different variations of ungoverned space was an important step forward in advancing understanding of this emerging security challenge, two additional issues remained to be clarified: What are the different kinds of geographical space within ungoverned territory that can provide armed groups with the opportunity to establish a safe haven? What makes these different geographical spaces attractive or conducive for non-state actors to exploit?

Rural, Urban and Maritime Sanctuaries

With respect to the different kinds of geographical space, attention to urban and maritime environments was added to the initial focus on remote rural and mountainous terrain. In the past, as noted above, regions that had little government presence were secluded territory characterized by rugged and

dense vegetation. These areas were considered ideal locations for armed groups' sanctuary. And if that remote territory was near "undefined, ill-defined, undefended, or disputed borders," then it was even more attractive. But it could not be so remote that serviceable transportation and communication systems were completely unavailable to armed groups "for the simple reason that such infrastructure enables them to operate, even if it provides the central government access to such areas as well."³⁴

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan are an archetypal example of a remote, rural safe haven where the central government has abdicated control and where licit and illicit actors vie for influence with local tribal populations. There is high tribal resistance to the Pakistani government and a set of social principles or tribal norms that have made the area attractive to a host of extremist groups to include the Afghan and Pakistan Taliban, the Haqqani Network, al-Qaeda, Islamist groups focused on Kashmir like Lashkar-e-Taibi, and criminal syndicates.

While remote rural areas remain important, during the latter half of the 20th century the world experienced a dramatic shift in population from the countryside to the urban milieu of cities and their surrounding environs. And, as one specialist has noted, "What makes this particularly important is that in the next few decades there will be more cities, more large cities, and more globally connected cities."³⁵ The number of cities with more than ten million inhabitants is projected to increase to "twenty-three by 2015 with nineteen of them in the developing world."³⁶ And cities with populations under ten but above one million will number over three hundred, with many also in the developing world.

Within a considerable number of these cities, many of which are located in weak states, there are "large slums that are often controlled by illicit actors and which are 'no go' areas for police." Additionally, many have "shanty towns, refugee camps, and squatters' villages" on their peripheries that likewise lack the presence of the government's security forces.³⁷ Consider Karachi; it is estimated that 40 percent of its population now live in slums, and those areas play host to various illicit groups like the Dawood Ibrahim criminal syndicate and Lashkar-e-Taibi, the Islamist organization responsible for terrorist attacks against targets in India including most notably that in Mumbai in 2008. Al-Qaeda has likewise taken advantage of Karachi.

These developments have turned Karachi, as well as Lagos, Johannesburg, Mexico City, and San Paulo, among others, into ideal locations for political

extremists, criminal syndicates, gangs, and other illicit actors. According to one specialist, given the high rate of unemployment and absence of government services, the populations of these cities “represent a ready source of recruits and a built-in intelligence network.”³⁸ Finally, thanks to modern communications, non-state actors within these urban safe havens can network to coordinate their activities with counterparts in other parts of the weak state and beyond.

Managing the irregular threats these armed groups pose has proven to be beyond the capacity of the police and security forces of many weak states. Richard Norton has observed that for fragile states “facing massive development challenges, even the military would be unequal to imposing legal order ... And while in other, more developed states it might be possible to use military force ... the cost would be extremely high, and the operation would be more likely to leave behind a field of rubble than a reclaimed and functioning population center.”³⁹ Once armed groups gain control of urban territory, if they have the resources, they can acquire weapons and set up systems of control and defense that are very difficult for the security forces of the state to dislodge.

A case in point was the situation the U.S. faced in Fallujah in 2004. In April of that year, the Marine command in Anbar province—I MEF—was told to take control of that city from the armed resistance. But part way into the assault, Washington issued a halt order and instructed the Marines to withdraw. Over the next six months, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was given a free hand in the city. Exploiting that opportunity, AQI moved with alacrity to take control of and build up its operational apparatus in Fallujah. To take charge, it eliminated any opposition to its authority through a brutal murder and intimidation campaign. During the next six months, AQI prepared Fallujah for the next Marine assault. They concentrated forces, built defenses, stockpiled weapons, and set up elaborate improvised explosive devices.

To regain control of Fallujah required a major ground combat operation by Marine-Army forces with plenty of air support. While successful, the city suffered extensive damage and required considerable rebuilding. In Brazil, violent criminal gangs involved in the drug trade have taken control of large shanty towns that are a part of Sao Paulo and Rio. The Brazilian government has adopted a containment policy which frequently involves pitched battles between police, traffickers, and criminal gangs.

Over the last decade, the maritime environment has emerged as another location in which the inability of governments to monitor activities in their littorals and coastal areas has provided opportunities for criminal syndicates and autonomous pirate gangs to exploit. To do so, these illicit actors must take control of a portion of territory adjacent to a maritime area that can serve as a base from which to operate. That area must provide access to their targets—commercial shipping and maritime commerce.

For example, pirates have emerged along the Somalia coast and Horn of Africa region where they threaten international shipping. According to one report, “at least 219 attacks occurred in this region in 2010, with 49 successful hijackings. Somali pirates have attacked ships in the Gulf of Aden, along Somalia’s eastern coastline, and outward into the Indian Ocean. Pirates now operate as far east as the Maldives in good weather, and as far south as the Mozambique Channel.”⁴⁰ As a result of these developments, NATO has implemented several measures to address the piracy challenge in the Horn, resulting in a significant downturn in incidents.⁴¹ Some specialists believe there are links between Somali pirates and the al-Qaeda associated jihad group al-Shabaab. While those linkages are murky, what is clear is that attacks by pirates in this region are linked to Somalia’s lack of a functioning government. This provides them with freedom of action and bases from which to operate.

Pirates likewise have emerged off the coast of West Africa in the region that encompasses the Gulf of Guinea. This area is second only to the Horn in terms of attacks on commercial shipping. Since 2009, attacks on tankers, barges, oil-industry vessels, and even oil platforms have involved robberies, kidnapping of crews, and hijacking of vessels. It appears that those carrying out these actions are more diverse when compared to their Horn of Africa counterparts. They include insurgents, crime cartels, and pirate gangs, all of which have the capacity to operate at sea. One example of the former is the MEND, which claims to be fighting on behalf of the people of the Delta. It steals crude oil and sells it to vessels at sea. Oil and other illicit economic opportunities have spawned other actors in the region to include autonomous pirate gangs who operate across the region from bases in the Delta. The direct and secondary cost of piracy to international commerce in the region includes rising “insurance rates, ransoms, self-protection measures, ship rerouting, naval operations, and piracy prosecutions,” as well as the

“macroeconomic impact on regional trade, on the region’s tourism and fishing industries, and on food prices.”⁴²

Other ungoverned maritime territory attractive to illicit actors can be found north of the Gulf of Guinea in the Bijagos Archipelago of Guinea-Bissau. Consisting of over 80 islands (many of which are not populated), islets, and coastal inlets, little governmental control exists over this large maritime area. As noted earlier, the archipelago is attractive as an entry point for the trans-shipment of Latin American drugs bound for Europe. Guinea-Bissau is part of a trafficking network that includes Cape Verde, Mali, Benin, Togo, and Ghana. Drugs from Colombia and Peru, which often transit through Brazil, are shipped across the Atlantic and enter Africa through these countries. According to the African Economic Development Institute, nearly two thirds of all cocaine on the way from South America to Europe passes through this region. These are all weak states, the report notes, “where government laws [and authority] are easily evaded. The areas’ high level of corruption makes effective law enforcement difficult to occur ... Drug traffickers are able to pay for their safety by recruiting policemen, army officers and cabinet ministers.”⁴³

Conduciveness of Ungoverned Territory

The inability or unwillingness of a weak state’s political authorities to effectively perform the core functions of governance beginning with providing security to its population, while necessary, may not be sufficient for that territory to be exploited as a safe haven by a terrorist, insurgent, or criminal group. Additional conditions have to be present to make it favorable for exploitation. The Rand study on ungoverned territory describes these conditions as conducive “environmental factors [that] allow terrorists and insurgent groups to flourish” in abdicated, under-governed or contested areas.⁴⁴

These include the extent to which armed groups are able to gain either the support of or coercive control over the local population. Intrastate conflict in weak states is population-centric “war amongst the people,” as Rupert Smith explains, in that it “can take place ... in the presence of civilians, against civilians, in defense of civilians.”⁴⁵ Consequently, armed groups may seek to gain the support or loyalty of the local population by engaging in a range of activities including provision of social programs and information operations. In these cases, support of the local population is gained through the achievement of legitimacy.

In the past, this approach has been taken by both ideological and identity-based insurgent movements. Their strategy has sought to undermine the legitimacy of the regime or intervening power, while simultaneously seeking to increase their own legitimacy with and support of the local population. The extent to which insurgents are able to address the local populations' political, economic, and social grievances, the more likely they are to have the opportunity to establish a safe haven. In other words, if they can take advantage of areas "where there are grievances against the regime and/or a preexisting state of communal conflict," then that territory will be more receptive to penetration and establishment of a safe haven.⁴⁶ And it will provide an opportunity to recruit personnel that can carry out the insurgent organization's different operational and administrative activities.

Other armed groups establish safe havens within abdicated, under-governed, or contested territory by enforcing coercive control over the local authorities and population. For example, criminal organizations typically seek to maintain dominance over local public officials through the use of violence, corruption, graft, or extortion. As for the indigenous population, in addition to the threat of force, their acquiescence can also be gained by providing illicit employment opportunities as an alternative to privation. This is the pattern followed by the drug cartels in Colombia and the Andean Ridge region since the late 1980s.

Extremist organizations also use force to gain coercive control over populations in territories in which they seek to establish sanctuary. For example, notes the Lamb report, "classic terrorism strategy" employs intimidation and violence "to attack civilians, not only to demonstrate that the state is too weak to protect them, but also to provoke the state into overreacting in a way that creates further civilian casualties; this tends to generate a sense among the population that the state is not merely weak but malicious as well."⁴⁷

For abdicated, under-governed, or contested territory to be conducive as a safe haven requires that it provide access to financial resources either from internal or external sources. All armed groups need funds to support their activities. Consequently, if an area contains a high value commodity like drugs, oil, precious stones, or other mineral resources that the armed group can exploit, then that territory will be seen as conducive for establishing a base. In such situations, an illicit actor directly exploits the indigenous commodity by controlling its export distribution. For example, the Taliban have been able to profit from poppy production in Afghanistan by doing so.

They have the power to insert themselves into the process. According to the RAND study, “groups can trade these commodities themselves, as in the case of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone and ‘conflict diamonds,’ or they can protect and tax them, which is the preferred approach of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia with the cocaine industry.”⁴⁸

If an ungoverned area serves as a transit point through which illicit goods pass, it can also become a source of financial largesse that an illicit group exploits, making it a favorable location for a sanctuary. In return for providing “security” to the trafficker to insure safe passage through the territory, the armed group receives remuneration. For example, Hezbollah has over the years benefited financially from drug traffickers transiting through the Bekaa Valley to Israel and Arab countries. They pay a transit fee to Hezbollah to access these markets.

An ungoverned area is also conducive to serving as a safe haven if financial resources flow into it from an external actor including Diasporas, immigrant communities in third countries that retain identity ties to their homeland. It is not uncommon for ethnic and communal communities that have migrated to another country to hold onto a strong sense of identity with the land of their origins. When kinship back home is engaged in violent conflict, the Diaspora, or elements within it, become committed to providing support to their brethren fighting to defend the homeland. A synergy develops between the armed element fighting in the homeland and the Diaspora located abroad. The relationship between Tamil communities in Canada, Great Britain, France, and Australia, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insurgents fighting in Sri Lanka until recently was illustrative. The Tamil Diaspora became a financier of the LTTE. Another external source, although a politically contentious one, is that of various charities and particularly religious ones. Nevertheless, since 9/11 a recurring theme with respect to the issue of extremist group financing has been the role of charitable organizations.⁴⁹

Wealthy individuals likewise can funnel funds to the safe havens of armed groups, making the area attractive as a sanctuary. For example, the Rand study notes that in the 1990s, a “prominent medical practitioner living in California is known to have pledged \$4 million to the LTTE ... making him the single most important contributor to the group.” According to one LTTE official, “We ask and he gives. [He] is our financial God.”⁵⁰ Likewise, the bipartisan National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United

States highlights the fact that al-Qaeda established an informal financial network of wealthy Saudi and other Gulf individuals who in the 1990s provided funds to establish an infrastructure of bases and capabilities in Afghanistan. It was from that safe haven that al-Qaeda planned and executed global strikes against the United States.⁵¹

Finally, for an abdicated, under-governed, or contested territory to function as a safe haven, “the existence of adequate infrastructure” is needed that permits an armed group to “perform basic functions. The elements of such an infrastructure include (1) communications facilities, (2) an official or unofficial banking system that allows for the transfer of funds, and (3) a transportation network that provides access to urban centers and potential external targets.”⁵² All armed groups require some minimal access to each of these, beginning with the capacity to communicate for operational, informational, and networking purposes. This can be accomplished through traditional telephone systems, cell phone service, or Internet connectivity. Illicit groups likewise not only need to be able to generate revenue, as was noted above, but require the ability to move those funds. Finally, the safe haven must provide some capacity to travel in and out of the sanctuary to reach targets, move supplies, and transport personnel.

To summarize, weak, very weak, and failing states, to varying degrees, are unable to control all their territory within their borders. This lack of a security presence and authority can take various forms and involves both physical space—abdicated, under-governed, and contested territory—as well as the virtual space of the Internet. As illustrated above, each of these areas in fragile states has been exploited as sanctuaries and safe havens for operational, financial, or informational purposes by various indigenous and transnational illicit actors.

3. Changing Patterns of Conflicts

To what extent do post-Cold War and post-9/11 intrastate conflict patterns correlate with state weakness and ungovernability? Do these conflict trends foster optimism or pessimism about the extent to which intrastate violence and instability will occur over the next decade? And how will the answer to these questions affect the decision by the U.S. government to “of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region,” as stated in the new Defense Strategic Guidance document that then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta released in January 2012?

That decision is premised on the assumption that the area stretching from Middle East and North Africa through South and Central Asia will no longer constitute a cockpit of instability threatening vital U.S. interests as it has since the end of the Cold War and in the shadow of 9/11. According to the logic of the pivot to the Pacific, the end of the Afghan engagement in 2014 will be accompanied by a reduction of the U.S. presence across this area where Washington has been heavily engaged managing irregular and transnational threats to its interests for more than two decades. But is it a prudent supposition that an area that will surely remain in violent turmoil will no longer necessitate considerable U.S. attention? Or will the U.S. find that fragile states across an area stretching from Mali through Pakistan and north into Central Asia will inevitably draw it back in?

If the latter is the case, would it not make sense to follow the advice of former Secretary Gates and prepare to focus on small advisory missions that are mainly preventative in scope and have as their objective building local security force capacity and accountability in fragile states? These missions aim to address the origins of weakness before it generates violent instability that might spread from local to regional levels. There may also be a need for larger missions to address situations where instability and armed conflict is taking place. In these circumstances a limited U.S. force deploys to assist a host nation to establish security, stability, and law and order. Should these contingencies receive a high priority? Before answering these questions, it is necessary to examine the patterns of intrastate conflict during the period since the end of the Cold War and to consider what those trends proffer for the next decade.

Starting in the 1990s scholars began observing that a detectable shift in the patterns of conflict and war were taking place. Interstate wars were sharply declining while intrastate conflicts were burgeoning. Consider the findings of K.J. Holsti for the period 1946-1995. He divided war into three categories based on the type of actors involved. The first was “standard state versus state wars and major armed intervention.” The former included the 1962 war between China and India and the 1973 battle pitting Israel against several of its Arab neighbors, while the U.S. intervention in Vietnam and the Soviet attack into Afghanistan were cited as illustrative of the later. The second category consisted of intrastate clashes and involved “state-nation wars including armed resistance by ethnic and religious groups, often with the purpose of separation.” The Balkans secessionist movements of the 1990s, the Tamils in Sri Lanka, and Kurdish factions in northern Iraq were all cited as examples. Each sought to break away from the state in which they were located. Finally, the third category included yet other intrastate struggles that pitted ideological movements against regimes they sought to change. These included Sendero Luminoso in Peru, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador, and the Armed Islamic Group (later the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) in Algeria.⁵³

For the period 1946-1995, Holsti found that “77 percent of the 164 wars [that took place] were internal,” pitting non-state actors in “armed combat ... against the authorities within the state.”⁵⁴ Accounting for this shift away from interstate warfare, he explained, was the fact that “in many areas of the world, the state is not the same as the community it encompasses.” In such situations, the state lacks legitimacy, resulting in clashes “over different conceptions of community and how those conceptions should be reflected in political arrangements and organizations.”⁵⁵ These differences, which were increasingly being played out by force and violence, were “not about foreign policy, security, honor or status,” but were “about statehood, governance, and the role and status of nations and [identity] communities within them.” In sum, the main causes of war, Holsti concluded, were no longer due to disagreements between states but the result of “domestic politics” and the dysfunctional nature of political community within the state.⁵⁶

This escalation in the number of intrastate conflicts during 1946-1995 was also characterized by a proliferation in the types of non-state actors challenging the state. Theodor Winkler, reflecting on those developments, observed that sub-state actors were becoming more diverse and multifarious: “If in the

past guerrilla groups and national liberation movements largely dominated the picture” during the Cold War. In its aftermath, he found many “different sub-state actors” including “ethnically-based militias, guerrilla or terrorist organizations, clans, tribes, warlords, organized communal groups and criminal gangs,” the latter of which could traffic in “human beings as easily as in small arms, drugs, blood diamonds, tropical woods, and any other commodity that sells.”⁵⁷ Others adopted the term “armed groups” to describe an array of post-Cold War non-state actors who employed IW tactics to attack states as well as one another. They proposed an “armed groups taxonomy consisting of four sub-types: insurgents, terrorists, militias, and criminal organizations,” but cautioned that in “the real world these distinctions are not so static or long lasting.” Rather, they found:

... the opposite is more likely. For example, at one point an armed group may be classified as a terrorist organization based on its operational and organizational profile, while at another point it morphs into a militia or criminal enterprise. In other instances, an armed group can simultaneously be described as fitting into more than one of the four subtypes. In other words, at the same time it can correspond to a terrorist organization and a criminal enterprise or some other combination.⁵⁸

Based on these findings, Holsti concluded that armed conflict in “the early years of the next millennium will not be war between states, but wars about and within states.”⁵⁹ Other academic specialists concurred,⁶⁰ but scholars were not alone in drawing such conclusions about the contemporary conditions and future course of conflict.

In 1997, the commandant of the Marine Corps, General Charles Krulak, in a speech at the National Press Club in Washington, warned that conflict and war in the future would be different from the conventional contingencies the Pentagon was preparing to fight at that time. Titling his speech “Not like Yesterday,” he counseled that this conventional mind-set could lead to military misfortunes: “Our enemies will not allow us to fight the son of Desert Storm, but they will try to draw us into the stepchild of Chechnya ... Our most dangerous enemies will challenge us asymmetrically [and unconventionally] in ways against which we are least able to bring strength to bear—as we witnessed in the slums of Mogadishu.”⁶¹ At the time, General Krulak was considered way out of step with his Pentagon counterparts. Those

irregular fights were considered at best tertiary security matters—internal disturbances, criminal enterprises, or ethnic group rivalries—of little consequence for those U.S. security institutions responsible for the conduct of warfare, diplomacy, and intelligence.⁶²

The conflicts Krulak saw emerging in the 1990s burgeoned in the years following 9/11. As they did, other former general officers began drawing similar conclusions. Consider General Rupert Smith, Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe from 1998 to 2001. During his career in the British Army, he was trained to fight 20th-century “interstate industrialized war.” But in the Cold War’s aftermath, General Smith had to deal with conflicts that diverged considerably from that standard in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Then he witnessed the 9/11 attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and al-Qaeda’s transnational operations. In his 2006 book, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern Age*, he contended that important changes had “undoubtedly occurred: from armies with comparable forces doing battle to a strategic confrontation between a range of combatants ... using different types of weapons, often improvised.” “War amongst the people” replaced 20th-century conventional war. Critical to making sense of this new state of affairs was realization that wars between nation-states, all too common in the 20th century, were becoming anomalies.⁶³

At the policy level, the Bush administration came to endorse a version of this assessment in the aftermath of 9/11 as it believed itself engaged with rising levels of Islamist political violence in what came to term a “global war on terror.” In the decade that followed this resulted in major interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, operations against extremist sanctuaries in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere, and a significant increase in SFA to nations seen as threatened by al-Qaeda and its associated movements. Within this evolving conflict environment, new or reignited armed conflicts associated with Islamist political violence, in conjunction with the major fights in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the operations against the previously identified sanctuaries painted a picture of long-term protracted irregular conflict with no early end state in sight.

But there was no unanimity over these conclusions. In the late 1990s and immediate years following 9/11 analysts utilizing macro-level quantitative research measures of global conflict trends raised questions about the pessimism that was implicit in the above assessments of post-Cold War and post-9/11 conflict trends and of the U.S. government’s security policies

upon which they were based. These specialists, who generally were from the development community and associated with international and non-governmental organizations found in their analysis that those conflicts that were taking place were less deadly and in terms of the number taking place were not on the rise. In terms of early 21st century instability and intrastate conflict trends they found cause for optimism.

For example, a 2003 study by Eriksson, Wallensteen, and Sollenberg—*Armed Conflict, 1989-2002*—found that based on a statistical dataset compiled under auspices of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo and Uppsala University that overall the numbers of armed conflicts taking place globally had been decreasing significantly between 1989 and 2002. They divided conflict during that period into the following categories:

- Interstate Armed Conflict - Occurs between two or more states
- Internationalized Intrastate Armed Conflict - Occurs between the government of a state and internal armed opposition groups with outside intervention from other states
- Intrastate Armed Conflict - Occurs between the government of a State and internal armed opposition groups without intervention from other states

While the data in Table 1 (following page) illustrates that “most of the conflicts in 2002 were internal,” which is consistent with the findings above, it also reveals a decline in their occurrence during the period. According to the authors: “During the 1989-2002 period, there were 116 armed conflicts in 79 locations around the world. In 2002, there were 31 conflicts active in 24 places, both figures being lower than in 2001.”⁶⁴ In fact, 2002 was the lowest year for the occurrence of intrastate conflict since the collapse of communism.

Additionally, Eriksson, Wallensteen, and Sollenberg found that the lethality of those conflicts that took place during the period 1989-2002 was also declining when they were broken down and categorized in terms of the number of battle-related deaths. To categorize lethality the following three subsets were used:

- Minor Armed Conflict - At least 25 battle-related deaths per year and fewer than 1,000 battle-related deaths during the course of the conflict

Table I. Interstate and Intrastate Armed Conflict, 1989-2002

<i>Type of conflict</i>	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	1989-2002
Intrastate	43	45	52	51	42	42	33	33	30	31	29	28	29	26	91
Internationalized Intrastate ^b	2	2	1	2	5	1	1	1	3	5	6	4	5	4	18
Interstate	3	3	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	7
All conflicts	48 ^a	50 ^a	54 ^a	54 ^a	47 ^a	43 ^a	35	36	34	38 ^a	37	34	35 ^a	31	116

^aRevised figure; see note 1 for an explanation.

^bThe category "International intrastate" has been renamed and recoded (prior to 2002, it was called "Intrastate with foreign intervention" and included fewer conflicts), in order to be consistent with the terminology used in the database at <http://www.prio.no/cwp/ArmedConflict/>. In an internationalized intrastate armed conflict, the government, the opposition or both sides receive support from other governments.

Table II. Armed Conflicts and Conflict Locations, 1989-2002

<i>Level of conflict</i>	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	1989-1946-2002 ^b
Minor	16 ^a	17 ^a	21	22 ^a	16 ^a	17 ^a	12	17	13	11 ^a	10	10	10	10	53
Intermediate	14	14	13	12	17	19	17	13	14	13	14 ^a	12	14	16	12
War	18	19	20	20	14	7	6	6	7	14	13 ^a	12	11	5	51
All conflicts	48 ^a	50 ^a	54 ^a	54 ^a	47 ^a	43 ^a	35	36	34	38 ^a	37	34	35 ^a	31	116
All locations	37	39	39 ^a	41	34 ^a	33 ^a	30	29	27	32	28	28	29 ^a	24 ^d	79

^a Revised figure; see note 1 for an explanation. For data back to 1946, see <http://www.prio.no/cwp/ArmedConflict/>.

^b At the highest level recorded.

^c As all conflicts are recorded at their highest level, there are more intermediate conflicts during the period 1989-2002 than during the longer period 1946-2002. Some of these conflicts had more than 1,000 battle-deaths in one or more years prior to 1989 and are therefore classified as wars for the long period.

^d Of the three new conflicts occurring in 2002, one conflict already had a location in 2001 (i.e. Angola). This explains why the reduction in the number of conflict locations 2001-2002 is larger (i.e. five) than the number of armed conflicts (i.e. four).

Source: Mikael Eriksson, Peter Wallensteen, Margareta Sollenberg, "Armed Conflict, 1989-2002," *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 40 No. 5, 2003.

- Intermediate Armed Conflict - At least 25 battle-related deaths per year and an accumulated total of at least 1,000 deaths, but fewer than 1,000 in any given year
- War - At least 1,000 battle-related deaths per year

As Table 2 depicts, conflicts in which 1,000 or more died per year “decreased significantly from 11 to 5 in 2002.” Moreover, this decline was even more noteworthy when compared with the initial post-Cold War years when as many as 20 took place. As for intermediate and minor armed conflicts, from the latter 1990s through 2001 they remained less than 15 each annually with the former consisting of one to four more than the latter. Only in 2002 did intermediate conflicts exceed 15.

These findings generated a significant controversy over whether the post-9/11 international security environment was characterized by rising or declining intrastate conflict and transnational terrorism. Earlier this study highlighted how senior U.S. officials asserted that the former was the case. However, other specialists, like those just cited, who approach the analysis of global and regional trends in armed conflict from human security and development perspectives, did not concur. Subsequently, independent research centers and organizations that initiated major efforts to assess global and regional trends in organized violence, their causes and consequences, drew similar conclusions.

An illustrative example is the Human Security Report Project which since 2005 has produced four major studies analyzing global and regional conflict trends through the support of the foreign and development ministries of the governments of Great Britain, Canada, Sweden, Norway, and Switzerland. Beginning in 2005, these studies claimed to document “a dramatic, but largely unknown, decline in the number of wars, genocides and human rights abuse over the previous decade.” Moreover, they found that wars were “not only far less frequent today, but are also far less deadly.” These trends were said to “confound conventional wisdom” and to “explode a number of widely believed myths about contemporary political violence” including the “claims that terrorism is currently the gravest threat to international security.”⁶⁵

So striking were these findings that former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan declared in the forward to the *Human Security Report 2009/2010* that “while global media reporting continues to create the impression that we live in an ever-more violent world, the reality behind

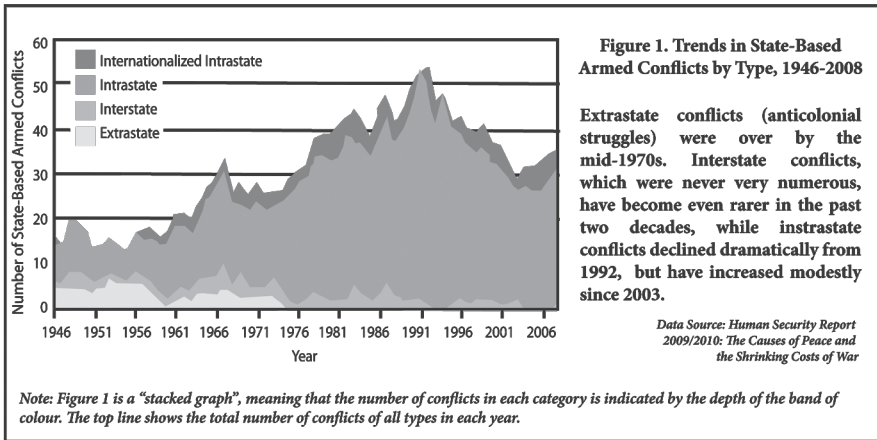
the headlines is quite different. The world has become much less insecure over the past 20 years. This study provides the first comprehensive analysis of this remarkable change.”⁶⁶ In addition to international media accounts, these findings were also at odds with much of U.S. national security policy during the timeframe in which these reports were released.

Recall that during this period both the public discourse of senior U.S. officials and assessments contained in two QDRs, the *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (QDDR) and several other notable directives and initiatives drew very different conclusions about global and regional armed conflict trends. They saw the challenges posed by weak and failing states as part of a transforming international security environment in which non-state armed groups were mushrooming in number and in the capacity to cause major geopolitical damage in their own territory and beyond through the use of irregular and unconventional means. Moreover, these intrastate and transnational conflicts were not seen as declining but persisting.

If in fact the findings of the Human Security Reports accurately capture the patterns of 21st century conflict and instability, then this would have important implications for U.S. security policy in general, as well as for SOF requirements as they relate to SFA and SSR initiatives. However, before addressing those issues, an examination and evaluation of the key findings and conclusions of the *Human Security Report 2009/2010* are warranted.

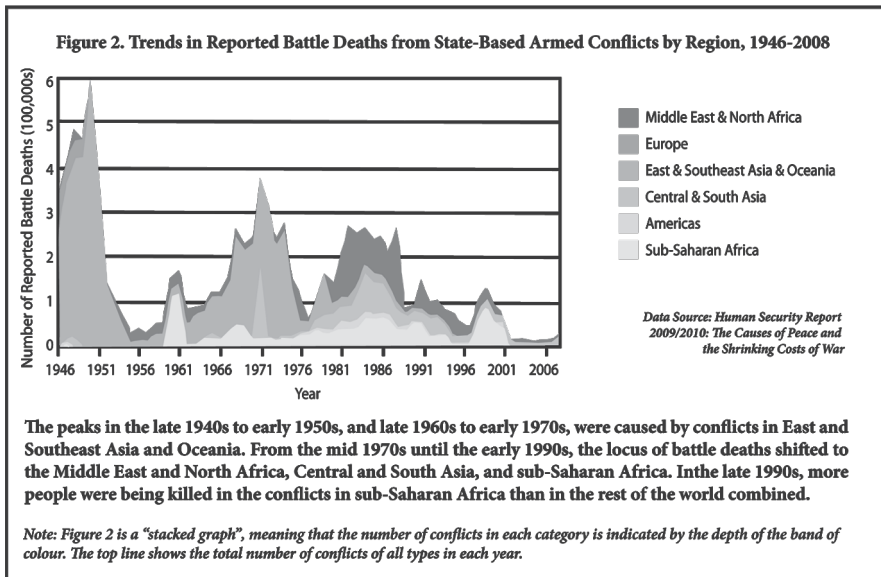
With respect to conflict trends, the report concurs with the findings first documented by Holsti in the 1990s. “The overwhelming majority of armed conflicts today are now fought within states” and involve “the government of a state and one or more non-state armed group.” On occasion, these intrastate or civil conflicts may take on an international dimension in that “the armed forces of another state may support one of the warring parties.”⁶⁷ This trend can be seen in Figure 1.

However, the findings depicted in the graph also challenge “the commonly held assumption that [intrastate] armed conflict around the world has become more widespread.” To the contrary, what the data reveals is that the number of intrastate conflicts—those between the government of a state and internal armed opposition groups—has declined sharply since the end of the Cold War. Even though “that decline stopped in 2003, and ... by 2008 had gone up by nearly 25 percent ... there are too few years of data to determine whether we are seeing a sustained reversal of the dramatic downward trend since the end of the Cold War.” They attribute this increase between



2004 and 2008 to "conflicts associated with Islamist political violence and the so-called War on Terror."⁶⁸

However, even with this increase, the report finds that intrastate conflicts as a whole "have become dramatically less deadly," corresponding with the trend reported above by Eriksson, Wallenstein, and Sollenberg.⁶⁹ This is because the number of intrastate conflicts with at least 25 but fewer than 1,000 battle-related deaths during the course of a year had continued to increase beyond 2002, when their findings ended. Consider Figure 2 below.



“The core message that emerges from more than six decades of battle-death data,” note the authors of the *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, is that “warfare has become progressively less deadly.” While it is the case that conflict numbers have increased between 2004 and 2008, “the striking, though very uneven, long-term decline in the deadliness of state-based conflict has not been reversed.”⁷⁰ As can be seen in the graph, from the late 1980s to the latter 1990s, battle deaths declined significantly, spiked back up around 1998-1999, and then again dropped precipitously. As a result, by 2008 there was “less than one-fifth of the toll in 1999.”⁷¹ Since 2001, the regions that have been “largely responsible for the increase in conflict numbers” are Central and South Asia due to “new or resurgent conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, as well as in India and Georgia.” This was followed by the Middle East and North Africa, where the “number of conflicts doubled between 2002 and 2005—going from three to six.”⁷²

Based on these findings, the report’s authors were optimistic given that the long term decline in intrastate conflict and the decrease in the risk and the lethality of war. “The trend to smaller wars, which has meant fewer battle deaths per conflict, shows few signs of being reversed ... While the future remains impossible to predict, and will surely deliver some unpleasant surprises as it has in the past, there are no obvious countervailing system-level forces that appear powerful enough to reverse the positive effects of the trends we have identified.”⁷³

But not all those who study the causes, sources, and nature of conflict agreed with these conclusions. They do not deem that intrastate discord among state and non-state actors is declining for several reasons. For example, Jack Snyder argues that the data employed to draw these deductions is too short term to generalize at this level, contending that “it is inappropriate to extrapolate from short-term trends.” Moreover, the data on battle-deaths “used to demonstrate that the deadliness of war is declining ignores *one-sided violence*—the intentional killing of civilians by governments and non-state armed groups.” That data discounts “*indirect deaths*—i.e., fatalities from war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition.”⁷⁴

Other specialists doubt the assessments found in studies like the *Human Security Report 2009/2010* based on their analyses of the causes and underlying conditions that foster irregular conflict. From this perspective, conflict is viewed as more complex, and predictions based on the ebb and flow in the number of cases in conjunction with battle deaths is misleading. According

to Hewitt, for example, intrastate conflicts is said to encompass a “myriad of factors, many of which are difficult to measure” and “depends on the type of conflict we analyze, the particular attributes of conflict, and whether our focus relates to global patterns or regional breakdowns.”⁷⁵

Consider those failing, very weak, and weak states found in the 2011 *Failed State Index* noted earlier. Of the top 13 failing, 22 very weak, and 73 weak states, less than a third would find their way into those studies counting the number of annual intrastate conflicts determined on the basis of battle deaths. This kind of appraisal fails to take into consideration the underlying nature of population-centric irregular conflict. To varying degrees, based on the political and social conditions fostering weakness in those states, their indigenous populations will hold deep-seated grievances with those ruling elites in power. Indeed, in many of these fragile states, whether democratic, authoritarian, or somewhere in between, there is a protracted struggle going on over political, social, and cultural values and visions. On one side are those who embrace human rights, democratic values, and the need for change. On the other side are leaders and groups with very different perspectives that seek to maintain the status quo. In effect, there is a competitive political contest taking place—a struggle over values and visions—in which one side seeks legitimacy through the promotion of democratic principles and other actors that seek control through the antithesis of those principles.

Internal cleavages based on deep seated grievances found in failing, very weak, and weak states are not easily resolved. These are psychological factors that also are not easily measured in quantitative studies like those above. Consider the *Human Security Report 2009/2010* assessment of the Middle East and North Africa. It concluded that “notwithstanding the much-publicized invasion of Lebanon by Israel in 2006, and the ongoing war in Iraq, conflict numbers have declined ... since the early 1980s.”⁷⁶ As noted above, such data trends could lead to the conclusion that not only has there been a decline in intrastate conflict in the Middle East and North Africa, but that this trend is not likely to be reversed. Consequently, concludes the 2009/2010 report, “No obvious countervailing system-level forces appear powerful enough to reverse the positive effects of the trends identified.”⁷⁷

But just a few years later, the Middle East and North Africa was turned upside down by violent and nonviolent movements that caused change in several regimes that were seen as invulnerable. What happened there can be explained by the internal dynamics of those states. Unrepresentative and

authoritarian elites, serious levels of corruption, unaccountable and repressive security institutions, and weak public services caused acute legitimacy and capacity gaps that had the potential to generate such challenges to state authority for many years. This is precisely what happened in six states that are part of the Arab Spring. For decades, a political struggle was taking place beneath the surface over values and visions, but those states maintained coercive control through powerful security agencies.

What this suggests is that a range of political, religious, and cultural differences exists in fragile states, which can result in violent and nonviolent challenges to state authority without clear indicators of early warning. These population-centric conflicts frequently involve an array of different non-state actors who challenge the legitimacy and authority of the state. Some of these actors embrace rule of law, human rights, and democratic values, while others hold very different and often extremist or criminal perspectives. The former can take the form of movements that seek legitimacy and change through the promotion of democratic principles, while the latter groups seek control through the antithesis of those principles.

In such cases, *human agency* factors are at play. Individuals and groups exercise their capacity for acting freely and challenge the authority of the larger political system. Individuals take part in a range of activities that may cause a potentially high risk situation that has been dormant for a

long period of time to burgeon into a violent or nonviolent challenge to state authority. Thus, human agency trumps the political structures of regimes that have been seen as impervious to such challenges.

In the above assessments of how to estimate the vulnerability of fragile states to internal instability and conflict, we see the classic debate between structure and agency. In the case of the former, illustrated in the discussion

But what those findings do not assess are agency factors, the capacity of internal challenges to state authority, and legitimacy generated by people.

of the findings of studies like the *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, conclusions are drawn from statistical data collected by national or international organizations. Those statistics are said to reveal identifiable trends in intra-state conflict as described above. But what those findings do not assess are agency factors, the capacity of internal challenges to state authority, and legitimacy generated by people.

If we take the Arab Spring states as a case in point, there appears to have been an implicit assumption that the downturn in internal instability in the region was due to the decades-long capacity of state security institutions to maintain coercive control in these states. As in the 1990s when dictatorships gave way to reform and democratic change across the developing world, the authoritarian regimes of the greater Middle East remained impervious to such change or reform. Indeed, as late as 2009, this was explained by specialists of the region as due to the fact that “the security sector constitutes the backbone of Arab political systems. Any discussion on reforming this sector exposes the systems’ inner vulnerability as well as their self-defense mechanisms.”⁷⁸ Studies by Mehran Kamrava, Eva Bellin, Barry Rubin, and Risa Brooks all concluded that powerful security machineries provided the means for these robust authoritarian regimes to maintain power for decades.⁷⁹ But the events beginning in early 2011 proved this not to be the case.

Likewise, the *Human Security Report 2009/2010* found that the end of the Cold War brought about “a dramatic decline in the number of armed conflicts in the Americas, many of which had been exacerbated by the East/West tensions.”⁸⁰ However, in the territory extending from Mexico into the Andes, criminal syndicates and gangs are challenging the authority of national governments through violence and corruption not captured in the estimates of intrastate conflict. This is because these illicit actors do not seek to overthrow the state and take power. Rather, their goal is to keep it weak so that they can carry out their criminal activities unimpeded. In doing so, they undermine the promotion of good governance and rule of law in these states.

In sum, such assessments do not take into consideration the fact that many of the fragile states that exists today—both democratic and authoritarian—are vulnerable to internal instability and the outbreak of conflict. This is because highly contentious politics are at play within their borders. As noted above, there are many political struggles taking place today in fragile states over competing values and visions. An alternative was to understand the significance of this political context and its implications for U.S. regional interests and security is to assess contemporary states by their type of government and level of performance.⁸¹

According to Freedom House, of the nearly 200 states included in its 2009 survey, more than half can be classified as democracies.⁸² But only a minority constitute stable liberal democracies that “protect the civil rights and political liberties of their citizens and have a high degree of the rule of

law.”⁸³ Numbering less than 40, these include the states of Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Japan. Liberal democracies are also described as strong states in terms of their ability to maintain a monopoly over the legitimate use of force, to control their territory, and to provide the core functions of good governance to their citizens.

What this means is that over 50 of the rest of the world’s democratic states are weak or very weak. Many of them face internal and external challenges to their territorial integrity and struggle to perform core functions for all their citizens. These states are vulnerable to political challenges to their legitimacy. Weak democracies are diverse as can be seen in the following examples selected from the 2009 Freedom House survey—Botswana, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru, Senegal, and South Africa. Weak democracies also include those in the process of political transition such as the states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

While some weak democracies may aspire to become liberal democracies, many of them do not uphold the rule of law or apply it consistently to all of their populations. Others may have nascent institutions and processes that do not protect civil liberties and therefore do not receive the full consent of all sectors of their population. Still others suffer from considerable degrees of official corruption. Weak democracies are often unable to maintain a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, control their territory, or perform the core function of the provision of human security. In weak democracies, human security is frequently at risk. Consequently, many weak democracies are vulnerable to political challenges to their legitimacy by groups and movements who may use either violence or civil resistance to do so.

There are approximately 70 states in the world with authoritarian governments according to Freedom House.⁸⁴ Some of these states, notably China, Russia, and Iran, are strong not because they have high degrees of legitimacy with their populations, but because they retain powerful internal security institutions that are not constrained by the rule of law. These authoritarian states derive their power to rule from strong institutions of coercion, and maintenance of a monopoly of force within their borders. Less than 20 authoritarian states worldwide meet these criteria.

Therefore, the majority of the authoritarian states today are weak, very weak, and in some cases failing. Both their coercive internal security institutions and competence to perform core functions of government are severely

limited. Moreover, corruption runs deep. Not only do these states lack legitimacy, they are also vulnerable to challenges from armed groups and civil resistance movements who may be perceived as being more legitimate than the state.

By definition, these weak states have limited resources to counter political challenges to their regimes. And when their weakness in basic governance intensifies, instead of reform they more often than not resort to more repression and the use of force against their citizens. As a result, armed groups often proliferate, challenging the fundamental security of the regime and even jeopardizing the continued existence of it. "Some weak authoritarian regimes engage in opportunistic alliances with other authoritarian states and non-state actors to compensate for poor performance and to buttress their ability to stay in power."⁸⁵

In sum, there are a large number of weak and very weak states today—both democratic and authoritarian—in which protracted struggles are taking place over political, social, and cultural values and visions. Often what one finds is on one side are those who embrace human rights, democratic values, and the need for reform and change. On the other side are leaders and groups with very different perspectives that seek to maintain the status quo. In effect, there is a competitive political contest taking place—a struggle over values and visions—in which one side seeks legitimacy through the promotion of democratic principles and other actors that seek control often through the antithesis of those principles.

This assessment is quite different from the optimistic view of the post-Cold War patterns of internal instability and conflict. The proliferation of state actors has significantly altered the contemporary security environment. There are more weak, very weak, and failing states than there are strong ones, and "more weak democracies than there are strong democracies."⁸⁶ Moreover, many of these weak states are vulnerable to internal challenges and the instability and conflict that can arise from it. These fragile states, whether democratic or authoritarian, "are also the most likely target for exploitation by opportunistic armed groups operating alone or in coalitions or loose networks with other state and non-state actors... Through their exploitation of the territorial, performance and legitimacy vulnerabilities of fragile states, an array of new actors—and new networks or coalitions of actors—have transformed the peripheral theaters of the 20th century into the likely battlegrounds of the 21st century."⁸⁷

These developments will have important implications for U.S. interests and foreign policy in the decade ahead. It is improbable that Washington will be able to avoid being drawn into the security challenges that weak states and armed groups will generate because they will affect those interests and policies. However, it will be much more cost effective for the U.S. to address these challenges, as Secretary Gates proposed, by developing an “early intervention” strategy. By doing so, Washington can assist those weak states that are located in key areas where it has interests at stake to “prevent festering problems from turning into crises that require costly and controversial direct military intervention.” But to do so, the U.S. will have to develop a strategy that takes this approach. The final two sections of the study will briefly outline the architecture for what such a strategy would entail and discuss the role of SOF in contributing to the execution of that strategy through its role of assisting in building the capacity and accountability of the security forces of partner governments.

4. A Strategy for Early Engagement

The principal objective of a U.S. strategy for early engagement is to avoid the high costs of responding to violent conflict once it has broken out and begun to escalate. Early action, as former Secretary Gates proposed, will aim to contain and deescalate such situations before they turn into catastrophes. Early engagement will likewise impede the spillover of violence and instability into surrounding regions through the flow of refugees, transport of weapons and illicit goods, and cross border movement of various armed groups. It is a reality that intrastate conflict is rarely confined within the borders of the country where it begins.

Consider the internal conflict taking place in Yemen. It has not remained localized as a result of the safe haven Yemen has provided for al-Qaeda's regional affiliate—al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Rather, it has served as a launching pad for transnational terrorist operations. Likewise, the conflict in Somalia has spilled across its borders bringing with it instability and violence to Kenya and other states in that region. An assessment of the region that encompasses Libya and Mali reveals how conflict in those states is having a destabilizing impact on the countries that surround them. Moreover, what Libya and the other states that are part of the ongoing Arab Spring uprising denote is that authoritarian regimes which appear to be outwardly stable have just below the surface those activating precipitants that cause violence and civil resistance to break out on short notice. Given today's transnational and interconnected world, such regional developments often have an impact on the security and interests of the United States and its allies.

As noted in this study, ineffective, corrupt, and repressive governing institutions are among the key precipitants igniting these and other intrastate conflicts. In many of the weak, very weak, and failing states identified earlier, the institutions that are supposed to provide social, economic, and security necessities to their populations do not do so either because of the corrupt and authoritarian nature of those regimes or because their political system lacks the capacity to do so. Institutions are too weak to cope with demands. This may be the case, for example, in weak democracies. The resulting lack of trust and confidence in key institutions, and especially those responsible for

security and justice, provide the conditions for civil resistance and violence which, in turn, can provide milieus that different illicit actors can exploit.

Consequently, when, as a result of these weak state conditions, intrastate instability appears imminent, the capacity to respond rapidly could stave off its outbreak or contain its escalation. Of course, the nature of the response will depend on the situation within the weak state. In other words, countries in the aftermath of an internal conflict will necessitate a response that will differ from that required for countries engaged in a political transition. In either case, a U.S. strategy of early engagement can have a stabilizing impact on the course of events.

As the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan, it will be important for it to develop a strategy to respond early to weak and conflict-prone states where it has significant interests at stake. The decision as to which states fall into this category and how to prioritize them is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is a fundamental assumption of the study that there are several such countries in which a decent into crisis, instability, and conflict will impact U.S. regional concerns. This will require a mechanism for identifying states that are at risk of the kinds of political, economic, or social shocks that trigger instability. A periodic review process for doing so should be established that can provide at minimum a biannual assessment of those states at risk. An early warning mechanism would provide the U.S. with the ability to set the necessary actions in motion to take proactive steps.

To respond with suitable and effective action, the U.S. will likewise require a range of appropriate skills and capabilities drawn from across the U.S. government to act on early warning that can be tailored to respond to specific conflict and transition scenarios. A broad range of capabilities is needed to conduct these missions. They can be divided into the following categories:

- Civil capabilities to strengthen indigenous government institutions to include those concerned with meeting material needs and political/societal expectations
- Capabilities to build indigenous civil security forces and the institutions that oversee them; these include police, constabulary, and intelligence agencies
- Military and defense capabilities that provide local military forces and the defense institutions that oversee them with the capacity to establish security and stability

Among this array of capabilities, those devoted to security force capacity building and security sector reform will play a key role. As the next section describes, security sector reform involves both civilian and military forces and institutions. Of those, military and defense engagement will play a critical role in supporting and fostering the development of capable and accountable military forces in weak states that can protect and win the support of their population and which are supervised by professional defense ministries. It is to the issue of the role of SOF, other U.S. military forces, and civilian defense constituents in security force assistance and defense institution building missions that we now turn.

5. Security Force Assistance and Defense Institution Building

The role of the DOD in an early engagement strategy for weak and/or transitioning states focuses on the twin missions of military-centric security sector stabilization (SSS) and SSR. However, before discussing the capabilities and skill sets needed for these interrelated missions, it is necessary to briefly describe what each concept involves and to highlight where the military services and defense ministries that manage them fit into stabilization and reform missions. We will begin with SSR and work our way back to stabilization.

Security Sector Reform

Security sector reform provides a framework for identifying which actors are relevant to improving security in a given weak state context. While SSR was developed as a holistic process, carrying out all of its various activities at the same time rarely, if ever, takes place. Specialists at the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF) note that “SSR does not imply doing everything simultaneously. Instead, it promotes planning the next specific activity in full awareness of the complex interdependencies that characterize SSR, fitting it within the broader SSR framework and regarding [each] activity as one step within the overall SSR process. The holistic nature of SSR also underscores the need for coordination among all key actors.”⁸⁸

According to DCAF specialists, “the security sector of a state is traditionally understood to include those agencies responsible for internal and external security” including “military forces, police and other law enforcement agencies, gendarmerie and paramilitary forces, intelligence and secret services, border guards and customs authorities, among others.” Each is “empowered with the legal right to bear arms on behalf of the state.” However, beyond these operating forces, specialists in SSR have broadened the security sector to include “non-state security and justice actors.”⁸⁹ Following is a listing of those institutions and groups they include as part of the security sector of a state:

- **Statutory Security Services** include those that provide security and have a mandate to do so from a state authority. They include at minimum the military services, police, gendarmerie, and intelligence agencies, as well as other security services that are concerned with borders, prisons, and customs.
- **Executive and Civil Ministries** manage and give direction to the security services. This can include defense, interior and foreign affairs.
- **Legislature and the Legislative Committees** develop security sector legislation, authorize expenditures, and oversee the statutory security services, as well as the executive and civil ministries that supervise them.
- **Justice Institutions** interpret the laws under which the security services operate.
- **Independent Oversight Agencies** are financed by the government but usually only report to the legislative branch, such as ombudspersons, human rights commissions, and anti-corruption agencies.
- **Civil Society Organizations**, including the media and nongovernmental political, religious, and social organizations can have a role in monitoring security sector performance, informing and educating the public about security and providing policy advice to the government.
- **Non-Statutory Armed Formations** include private military and security companies and community self-defense groups that operate in traditional societies, as well as actors such as organized armed groups that seek to undermine or destroy the state.
- **External Actors** include national donors, international and intergovernmental organizations supporting SSR or are otherwise involved in security affairs, criminal and terrorist groups, and the security forces of foreign countries.

The security sector is seen as a critical capability that weak states must improve to address both traditional security requirements—protecting the state—as well as the human security requirements of ensuring the wellbeing of the states' citizens. Depending on the context, it may first be necessary to carry out security force stabilization and only after that is achieved to undertake reform of the security and justice sectors of weak states. Put another

way, SSS may be needed to serve as a table setter before undertaking SSR, which seeks to “transform the [security and justice] sector into an instrument of conflict prevention and management,” contributing to “development and paving the way for development activities.”⁹⁰ Building on this understanding, specialists at DCAF conceptualized the SSR process in Figure 3:

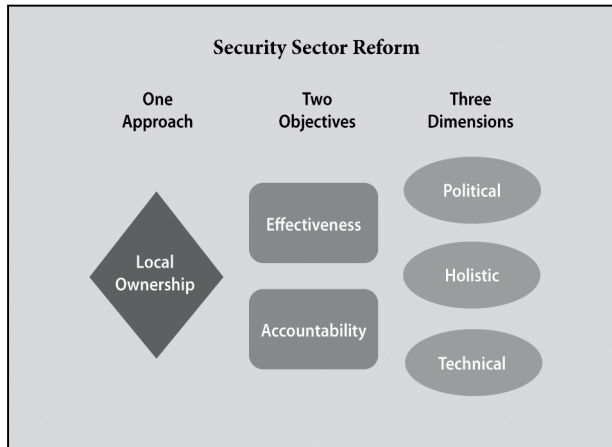


Figure 3. Security Sector Reform model

This illustration characterizes the SSR process as consisting of one general approach, two primary objectives, and three essential dimensions. Local ownership stipulates that the impetus for reform has to come from within the state itself and cannot be orchestrated by an external actor or third party. In other words, writes Laurie Nathan, “The reform of security [and justice] policies, institutions and activities in a given country must be designed, managed and implemented by local actors rather than external actors.”⁹¹ While there may be one generalized approach, the local milieu will determine on which institutions to focus. External actors cannot direct this process. The approach has to be contextualized by local actors and focused on local conditions and requirements.

With respect to the twin objectives of effectiveness and accountability, they go hand in hand. However, there is a propensity among SSR specialists to focus more on the accountability of the security services. This is understandable given the fact that in many weak states the security forces constitute a major source of insecurity and authoritarian control. Focusing on improving their effectiveness can result in the enhancing of these repressive

skills. “An effective and well-equipped army could ... be an obstacle to long-term peace and development if it were to use its skills and capacity to oppress citizens or violate their fundamental rights. Ensuring effective accountability” through formal management and governance mechanisms serve as checks against this from happening.⁹² Accountability establishes formal institutional mechanisms at the executive and parliamentary levels for management and oversight of the security services. With respect to military forces, these include a clear chain of command, civilian oversight and control, a professional code of conduct, and rules of engagement that respect human rights and adhere to rule of law. Similar procedures are established for the other civilian security services.⁹³

While accountability is critical, effectiveness cannot be overlooked or downplayed. Weak states can and often do face challenges from illicit armed groups. With respect to military forces, effectiveness is accomplished by enhanced training for the most likely contingencies they will face, upgrading equipment and infrastructure for those contingencies, and strengthening the military chain of command and civilian institutions that have responsibility for managing them.

Finally, the three dimensions of the SSR process highlight its political and technical complexity and the degree to which those third parties that intercede in this process through aid and assistance must understand each. The political nature of SSR is reflected in the fact that it seeks to affect power relations within the state and how the state regulates its monopoly over the use of force as it relates to security, rule of law, and human rights. All of this makes the SSR process highly political both domestically and for international actors that seek to foster it through assistance. Therefore, this requires that third parties have a “high level of political understanding and sensitivity,” and employ “analytical, research and negotiation skills,” in conjunction with diplomacy when seeking to engage in SSR support programs. In other words, before the DOD provides SFA and defense institution building assistance, arrangements must be established with the host country that provide entry points for assistance and establish a commitment to reform.

Security Sector Stabilization

Depending on the local security context a weak state may not satisfy the conditions necessary to initiate the security sector reform process. This is due to the fact that in weak states experiencing conflict the capacity of the security

forces is low, particularly in terms of their ability to respond to a contested environment. That environment is likely to be characterized by varying degrees of active violence, the failure of security institutions to respond to it, and the absence of a political settlement. Such situations are in need of stabilization and to achieve it the security forces have to be strengthened in terms of their capacity and effectiveness. In these situations basic security must come first before reform can be fully addressed.

According to Danish specialist Peter Dahl Thruelsen, security sector stabilization takes place in “non-permissive environments” which can range from “general war fighting to low-risk military engagement.”⁹⁴ Stabilization is focused on “stability generation.” By this he means building security forces that can address tactical level requirements. This becomes the highest priority because the “overwhelming security concern” is with “the need to create a minimum level of stability.”⁹⁵ There will be no progress toward reform of the security sector without it. In non-permissive contexts preventing further state breakdown has to come first or little else will be accomplished. What the implementation of a successful stabilization program achieves is that it enables key security providers including the military services, police, gendarmerie, and intelligence agencies to mitigate the violence being orchestrated by armed groups.

The initial role of third parties in these situations is to provide SFA in the form of “train and equip” programs that aim to improve the capacity and effectiveness of a weak state’s statutory security forces to manage internal instability. Engagement by external actors in the non-permissive environment of weak states helps those security forces address basic security challenges. However, in providing SFA, the third power should do so with the view that this is an interim or initial step that responds to the immediate security challenges but also establishes the foundation for reform. In many ways this can be thought of as a two-step process in which stabilization lessens the violence and instability in the short term, while setting the conditions for long term reform of the security sector.

According to Thruelsen, it is important to introduce basic concepts of SSR within train and equip programs: “when implementing programs in the SSS phase, plans for reforming the trained units ... must be made ready early in the process. This is especially important if one wants to avoid initiatives in the SSS phase that will ultimately undermine the program of SSR.”⁹⁶ What Thruelsen is referring to is the danger that in addressing the need to build

security force capacity and effectiveness to address violence and instability, programs that encourage accountability by those forces are sidetracked.

To circumvent this outcome, he proposes that third party train and equip missions for a weak state's security forces engage at "all stages of development, from basic training to participating in combat operations and eventually in the transition process." The members of these missions "will have to follow the national units on the job, mentoring them and monitoring their progress" encouraging them "to avoid abuse, looting, corruption and other activities that will undermine the local perception of the new forces as legitimate security providers."⁹⁷ Thus, when stabilization is the priority, there is danger if it does not introduce and begin to embed the foundation elements of security sector reform. The experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan did not follow this course of action. The urgency for executing SFA operations led to a focus on building up the capacity of the force being generated. In those cases, those foundation elements of reform that could contribute to longer term security force development and accountability were only belatedly embedded in the stabilization process.

Capabilities and Skill Sets for Early Engagement

Former Secretary of Defense Gates, as noted earlier, asserted that "the most important military component" for today's persistent and irregular conflicts "is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern their own countries." To this end, he challenged the military to prepare for partner capacity building, stability operations, SFA, and defense institution building missions.⁹⁸

As this study has illustrated, most weak states have limited capabilities to counter the complex array of security challenges that armed groups and other non-state actors can pose. Because of this, the former Secretary of Defense steadfastly advocated that the U.S. make a significant commitment to enhancing its SFA and defense institution building capabilities for assisting, training, and mentoring indigenous military forces and the institutions that manage them in weak states. To do so would entail maintaining sufficient U.S. capabilities with the appropriate skill sets. While SFA missions can take place in both permissive and contested environments, Gates stressed that special attention should be given to how SFA could be employed as a preemptive/preventive tool to assist weak states before the challenges posed by armed groups became robust.

SFA can span the spectrum of conflict. It is focused on organizing, training, equipping, rebuilding, and assisting host nation security forces to address challenges in their operating environment. However, since 9/11 the priority aim of SFA is to improve the capability and capacity of host-nation security forces to manage irregular challenges. In late 2010, this was affirmed in DOD Instruction 5000.68, which asserted “SFA activities shall be conducted primarily to assist host countries to defend against internal and transnational threats to stability.” While other missions were noted, “SFA oriented towards supporting a host country’s efforts to counter internal threats from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency” was emphasized.⁹⁹

SFA can span the spectrum of conflict. It is focused on organizing, training, equipping, rebuilding, and assisting host nation security forces to address challenges in their operating environment.

In post-9/11 SFA doctrine, host-nation foreign security forces include “Duly constituted military, paramilitary, police, and constabulary forces of a government.”¹⁰⁰ To manage irregular conflicts, each is said to require attention as part of U.S. assistance missions. But not all of these statutory forces fall under the authority of the DOD. Its primary role in SFA is to “organize, train, equip, and advise foreign military forces, foreign paramilitary security forces such as border and coastal control forces, and counterterrorist forces,” and to “support the development of host-country defense institutions and ministries.”¹⁰¹ It has been the case that since 9/11 the authority of DOD was expanded by the Congress beyond these SFA missions to include training the police forces of Iraq and Afghanistan. But it seems unlikely that this authority will be extended beyond these cases, and therefore in the future DOD efforts will remain centered on host nation military, paramilitary, and counterterrorist forces.

Within the U.S. military, SOF have been designated as the most appropriate for executing SFA missions. This is because they are organized, trained, and equipped to conduct small-unit operations against irregular enemies and possess both regionally focused language and cultural skills. Especially since 9/11, SOF have been seen as well suited for employment in the most frequently initiated SFA missions, those that involve indigenous force capacity building to meet irregular threats.

However, if SFA policy is to move in the direction proposed by former Secretary Gates, then the number of SFA missions will expand. In the post-9/11 period, the major focus of SFA has been on states that are facing serious internal threats from extremist groups or on weak and vulnerable states in regions that are deemed critical to U.S. interests. In these cases, the provision of SFA was driven by the war on terror. SFA went to militaries in countries that met these criteria. The major recipients included Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Djibouti, Jordan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. A recent regional example is the SFA-type operations to several nations in the Trans Sahel. SFA in these cases consisted of weapons and equipment, training in counterterrorism and irregular warfare techniques, and instruction in intelligence gathering and analysis. Some of these militaries, due to their lack of elementary capabilities, also required basic necessities to include uniforms, vehicles, communications equipment, ammunition, and even salary support. In other cases, assistance took the form of sophisticated and high-priced items such as helicopters and small boats.

Because effectiveness was the goal of these SFA programs, attention to accountability and reform tended to be overlooked. Improving capacity was the priority because of the need to achieve a meaningful level of stability. In such non-permissive contexts attaining this was seen as having to come first, or little else would be accomplished. However, as Thruelsen observed earlier, “when implementing programs in the SSS phase, plans for reforming the trained units ... must be made ready early in the process. This is especially important if one wants to avoid initiatives in the SSS phase that will ultimately undermine the program of SSR.”¹⁰²

Under the Gates proposal, SFA would be elevated to a core mission for the DOD. In an era of persistent irregular conflict and the need for persistent engagement, SFA would be approached as a strategic tool for managing challenges to U.S. interests. SFA missions would include weak states where the armed group threat is in its incipient stage. If adopted, this early intervention approach will increase the demand for an increasing number of SFA missions. In doing so, it raises three important questions: one, will SOF have sufficient capacity to meet demand, or must the conventional forces be engaged; two, do SOF have the appropriate skill sets to train and mentor weak state military and paramilitary forces to become both operationally effective and professionally accountable; and three, if strengthening and professionalizing

the defense institutions that manage a host nation's military forces becomes an integral part of SFA missions, then what SSR capacity will DOD require? The remainder of this study will comment on each of these issues.

Expanding the SFA Force

While the DOD and military services have initiated a number of changes in “doctrine and training manuals, focusing on counterinsurgency, stabilization, and training/advising foreign militaries ... what has lagged behind in these initiatives,” according to one recent assessment, “is a commensurate degree of force structure capabilities to meet our future requirements.”¹⁰³ If the demand for SFA expands, then the gap between SFA missions and the capabilities needed to carry them out will become wider. And those missions will require skills that have either been in short supply or nonexistent as part of the capacity building programs the U.S. offers to host-nation military forces.

The suggestions that follow address both the forces needed for SFA missions and the skill sets that have to be added to those expanding SFA forces. Writing in 2010, Brigadier General Edward Donnelly, the Army's deputy director for strategy observed that “with the heightened threat extremist groups pose to regional and global stability, the U.S. Army must accept this SFA role. Because the threat is persistent, the response must be persistent.”¹⁰⁴ For the Army to do so, the size of the force needed for SFA missions will have to expand. There will not be sufficient SOF to meet the SFA demands from the geographic combatant commanders.

This fact was recognized in the 2011 U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) introductory guide for SFA. It explained that SFA activities have been growing over the last decade, and to build the operational proficiency and professional accountability of foreign security forces for an expanding number of states will require more SOF and other DOD capabilities.¹⁰⁵ But hastily expanding SOF, which are the most appropriate for SFA missions because of their interpersonal and military skills, language ability, and the facility to comprehend and influence other people, is not a viable short-term solution; developing SOF personnel is a long-term process that involves considerable amounts of training and education coupled with several deployments where advisory skills are honed through operational experiences with foreign security forces.

Consequently, the USSOCOM guide asserts that Army conventional forces will have to be employed to augment the SFA missions conducted by SOF. Indeed, there is the assumption that the “role of conventional forces in SFA will continue to grow.”¹⁰⁶ In recognition of these developments the Army issued *Field Manual 3-07.1 Security Force Assistance* (FM 3-07.1) to provide a framework for adapting conventional force brigade combat teams (BCTs) for SFA employment.¹⁰⁷ To do so, the manual proposed procedures to adapt Army force management institutions to meet expanding SFA mission requirements and to make SFA part of conventional forces core competencies. What follows is a brief synopsis of how FM 3-07.1 proposed to carry this out.

Drawing on lessons from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom where the Army employed maneuver brigade combat teams to build and train the Iraqi and Afghan security forces, conventional forces brigades will be tailored and augmented during the regular training cycle to execute SFA missions. This will support a dual system of supply to meet the growing SFA demand. When the demand for an SFA mission can be met by SOF, USSOCOM will task the appropriate elements to execute the mission. If need be it will be augmented with the necessary support elements. When the source of supply is a conventional force brigade, Army Forces Command will task the appropriate BCT to prepare for SFA within the Army Force Generation training cycle for BCTs, and request appropriate augmentation as needed.

Once a BCT is selected for SFA missions, according to FM 3-07.1, it is then prepared for those missions during its regular 18-month train-ready phase, which is focused mostly on conventional combined arms maneuver preparation (conventional warfighting). SFA training will become part of the BCTs work up to prepare for full-spectrum operations. During the train-ready phase, units will receive those individuals, capabilities, training, and any special equipment required for the SFA mission.¹⁰⁸

To manage and facilitate this preparation, the Army established the 162d Training Brigade. During a 60-day training program, it is said to provide the BCT with relevant language, regional, and cultural awareness education, as well as training in a range of counterinsurgency related tactical skills. The latter includes patrolling, small arms training, urban operations, and countering improvised explosive devices. During this train-ready phase, BCTs coordinate with Army service component commands, country teams,

offices of defense cooperation or coordination, and regionally focused SOF to enhance SFA mission preparation and regional orientation.

This decision by the Army to meet the growing demand for indigenous security force capacity building by folding the SFA mission within the full spectrum training cycle for conventional forces has been questioned. Some critics doubt that the Army can meet indigenous security force capacity building mission requirements through this approach. They question whether this approach will be able to meet the growing demands of the geographical commands for more SFA missions to support their agendas for theater security cooperation, military engagement, and partner capacity building. These requests will continue to grow in a period of persistent irregular conflict, but BCTs, trained for SFA missions in this manner, are unlikely to have the capacity or skill sets needed to successfully execute those missions.¹⁰⁹

Other solutions are needed to generate effective SFA capabilities to assist weak states manage the irregular challenges of armed groups by providing the right kind of security force capacity building. Perhaps a starting point to do so is for the DOD to consider establishing an SFA agency that has the primary responsibility of managing the growing SFA demands of the geographic commands. That agency will meet those demands by fostering the development of a critical mass of specialized forces with the skills needed to train foreign military forces, foreign paramilitary security forces such as border and coastal control forces, and counterterrorist personnel. The scope of the training and mentoring provided to these indigenous forces will center on how best to help them manage irregular and population-centric conflicts that can range from ones that are in an embryonic stage to those that are more intense. The agency should be sub-divided and aligned with the different geographic commands. The details for establishing such an SFA organization are beyond the scope of this paper, but as a starting point, it should be given consideration as a way of managing the SFA challenge.

Expanding SFA Skill Sets

The skill sets needed to train indigenous security forces likewise have some identifiable gaps that have to be addressed if the SFA mission is broadened to include military effectiveness, accountability, and reform. As noted previously, SOF retain the most appropriate skill sets for SFA missions because

they maintain the training and mentoring know-how most appropriate for assisting host-nation indigenous forces.

With respect to those indigenous forces that SOF traditionally have trained—military and paramilitary forces—there are aspects of that training that are deficient. A review of Special Forces (SF) training guides supports this proposition.¹¹⁰ Much of what SF provides to indigenous military and paramilitary forces can best be characterized as small unit training to counter insurgents, guerrillas, and other irregular forces. Of course, this is tailored to the needs of the host nation and can vary from mission to mission. Nevertheless, the following subjects are generally part of standard training missions: patrolling and small unit tactics, weapons use, communications, intelligence, field fortifications, small unit exercises, and instruction in the law of land warfare.

While SOF retain robust skill sets to execute these activities, gaps and deficiencies are also present. For example, while education in the law of land warfare is necessary for indigenous military and paramilitary forces involved in fighting or seeking to prevent irregular population centric con-

... a broader approach to SFA that encompasses military effectiveness, accountability, and reform would introduce into the training regimen the norms and standards of the legal framework that regulates civil-military relations in democratic systems.

conflict, it is not sufficient. Like police forces, military and paramilitary forces likewise need to be provided with rule of law and integrity training for operating within the population because that is the context in which today's irregular intrastate conflicts are taking place. But SOF do not have that capacity and the requisite skill sets to provide it to indigenous forces. They need to be developed, and there are nongovernmental organizations that can

be engaged who have expertise in these areas.¹¹¹

Additionally, a broader approach to SFA that encompasses military effectiveness, accountability, and reform would introduce into the training regimen the norms and standards of the legal framework that regulates civil-military relations in democratic systems. This would entail, according to the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, the "development of educational measures that attempt to inculcate a new security culture ... through a focus on such issues as civil-military cooperation ... [and] training of security personnel on such issues as democratic values,

human rights, international humanitarian law, and democratic control of armed forces norms.”¹¹² It would also involve related educational measures that focus on other “key features of an effective system of democratic control” including “respect for a clear chain of command, civilian oversight and control, a professional code of conduct, and rules of engagement that respect human rights and adhere to rule of law.”¹¹³

Expertise in these subjects does exist within the U.S. professional military education system. For example, the Naval Postgraduate School’s Center for Democratic Civil-Military Relations has developed curriculum and instructional methods for these aspects of SSR. These activities include sending mobile education teams to assist countries in transition to strengthen their military and security institutions to become more democratically accountable. International organizations like the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces likewise have developed similar methods. This expertise can be drawn on to help develop the kinds of skill sets and capacity building assets that should be added to the expanded SFA process proposed here.

Capabilities for Professionalizing Defense Institutions

Finally, the expanded approach to SFA policy proposed here includes capabilities for strengthening and professionalizing the defense institutions that manage a host nation’s military forces. This concept echoes former Secretary Gates’ call to advance the process of transforming the capacity of defense institutions in states where the U.S. is providing training and assistance to its military forces. What Gates had in mind has come to be referred to as defense institution building (DIB) within the Pentagon. According to the findings from a 2011 conference focused on it, DIB refers to “programs, structures, and processes used to develop effective, efficient, and accountable partner defense establishments, including defense ministries, joint and general staffs and commands, and the supporting institutions of the armed forces.”¹¹⁴ The focal point for such efforts includes “newly independent nations, developing countries, and those states in transition or emerging from conflict.”¹¹⁵ The reality is that in such weak states, civilian-managed defense ministries are underdeveloped or nonexistent. Where such institutions exist, the interaction between the military and its civilian counterparts tends to be dominated by those in uniform.

The core elements and boundaries of defense institution building revolve around fostering a civil-military relationship in which a civilian-led defense institution exercises legitimate authority over the states military forces, overseeing and managing those forces within a legal-based framework that specifies duties, processes, and accountability. However, as the DIB report noted, “Developing the effectiveness of [such] defense institutions can be a challenge” for third parties because those strengthened defense institutions need to be “in harmony with other elements of the partner nation’s government. A partner nation’s defense institutions must be able to effectively respond to national security threats, but also must be accountable to the public and respect the rule of law, human rights, and practice good governance and general accountability.”¹¹⁶ This adds to the challenge that DOD-sponsored defense institution building faces.

Defense institution building, as described above, can be understood as a part of the larger SSR process. Recall that SSR theory defines the statutory security sector of a state as encompassing those agencies responsible for internal and external security, including military forces, police and other law enforcement agencies, gendarmerie and paramilitary forces, intelligence and secret services, border guards and customs authorities, as well as those government bodies that oversee, manage, and give direction to them. Consequently, SSR encompasses not just defense, but also includes the justice, intelligence, and internal security systems of the state. With respect to military forces, SSR would include, most importantly, promotion of the establishment of a civilian led defense ministry. Similar agencies or ministries would perform the same functions for other nonmilitary statutory security forces. While DIB is an integral part of this broader SSR process, it can be undertaken more narrowly as part of a third party’s focus on military forces and management institutions, serving as a prelude to a larger SSR effort.

To add defense institution building as part of the broader approach to SEA proposed here, the DOD will require the development of a cadre of civilian advisors who specialize in the key functional tasks of a defense ministry. During the late stages of Secretary Gates’ stewardship, modest steps were taken to do so. But if DIB programs are to expand, shortfalls in personnel with the appropriate skill sets will have to be addressed. These advisory competencies include fostering both ministry effectiveness and accountability. While effectiveness in performing specific functional specializations such as policy and strategy formulation, force development, and planning,

budgeting and management are critical in reforming a defense ministry; equally, if not more important, is the capacity to help defense ministries embrace a culture of accountability.

In sum, for the DOD to increase its engagement in DIB as part of an expanded SFA policy, important capacity challenges will have to be identified and addressed. Currently, DIB programs are scattered in DOD and the scale of those programs would not be adequate for the policy proposed in this study. It will be necessary, as a starting point, to develop a capabilities framework for DIB that both identifies the essential roles and responsibilities for advisors, and the skill sets needed by them to carry out those activities for a host government's defense ministry.

6. Conclusion

Key Findings and National Security Implications

Former Secretary Gates, during the latter period of his tenure in the Pentagon, frequently asserted that the security challenges the U.S. will most often face in the 21st century would differ from those of the Cold War. He emphasized that weak and failing states were a key part of a transforming international security environment. And in these fragile states non-state armed groups were mushrooming in number and in the capacity, and could cause major geopolitical damage in their own territory and beyond through the use of irregular and unconventional means. The secretary believed that these situations would result in most persistent and dangerous challenges the U.S. was likely to face to its interests and security. Unlike the Cold War when the most serious threats came from strong and powerful states, in the 21st century weak and failing states will be the source of acute security challenges posed by non-state armed groups.

To meet these irregular challenges, Former Secretary Gates proposed that an “early intervention” approach was essential. He believed this was necessary because the Obama administration was moving away from major interventions like those that had taken place in Afghanistan and Iraq following 9/11. As a substitute, he proposed the U.S. employ “indirect approaches—primarily through building the institutional capacity of partner governments and their security forces—to prevent festering problems from turning into crises that require costly and controversial direct military intervention.” This approach, the secretary concluded, “is arguably as important as, if not more so than the fighting the United States does itself.”¹¹⁷

This study sought to determine in the first part whether Secretary Gates’ assertion that weak and failing states constitute a serious and persistent challenge to international peace and stability is the case, and if so to what degree. Weak states have been the subject of considerable recent academic and public policy attention. Several research projects have identified key factors that contribute to state weakness and incapacity, and the impact these factors have on local, regional, and international stability. To gain a better understanding of the extent to which weak states constitute a burgeoning

international problem, the findings from the 2011 *Failed States Index* were examined.

Annually since 2005, the index has categorized states along a continuum from strong to weak, very weak, failing, and failed, identifying the principle sources of state strength and weakness. Of the 177 states assessed in 2011, 73 were classified as weak, 22 as very weak, and 13 as failing or failed. These states, to varying degrees, were described as unable to maintain control over the territory within their official borders, to retain a monopoly over the use of force within that territory, and to perform core governmental functions beginning with the security of their citizens. Many of these states were also said to be plagued by corrupt and moribund institutions, poverty, the violation of human rights, and disregard for the rule of law. As a result, acute capacity gaps in these fragile states frequently generated violent and/or nonviolent opposition groups and movements.

An unpacking of the 2011 aggregate scores for weak, very weak, and failing states finds that these preconditions or underlying sources of instability can trigger uprisings like that of the Arab Spring and, consequently, constitute a serious global challenge for the international community today and into the future, as Secretary Gates asserted. These sources of instability have serious repercussions not just for the weak state and its people, but also for its neighbors and even other states beyond the immediate regional milieu. This is particularly the case when a weak state's performance gaps, political tensions, and dysfunctional policies deteriorate into internal conflict and violence.

A second key finding in the study that supports Secretary Gates' contention that the most persistent and dangerous irregular security challenges will be fostered by fragile states in the ungoverned territory that exists within the boundaries of many of those states. The second section of the study describes four subtypes of ungoverned territories: abdicated, incomplete or under-governed, contested, and exploitable areas. In each subtype, to varying degrees, the central government is unable or unwilling to extend control, effectively govern, or exert influence. Moreover, numerous examples cited in the study reveal that each of these subtypes exists in the rural, urban, maritime, or virtual domains of fragile states, and each has been exploited as sanctuaries and safe havens for operational, financial, or informational purposes by various indigenous and transnational illicit actors.

Finally, the study finds that post-Cold War and post-9/11 intrastate conflict trends coincide with state weakness and ungovernability, and these trends will persist in the decade ahead. Starting in the 1990s, scholars began observing a detectable and significant shift in the patterns of violent conflict and war that was taking place across different regions of the world. Interstate wars were sharply declining, while intrastate conflicts were burgeoning in fragile states. These intrastate conflicts pitted non-state armed groups against the institutions and authorities of the state. Accounting for this shift was the fact that in many areas of the world, fragile states lacked legitimacy due to their high levels of corruption, excessively repressive state security institutions, and inability to carry out the core functions of government beginning with the protection of their citizens. This escalation in intrastate conflict was also fostered by a proliferation in different types of non-state armed groups challenging weak states. Some of them can pose complex irregular security threats at the local, regional, and even global levels. Moreover, these armed groups are developing cooperative relationships ranging from *de facto* coalitions to loose affiliations, magnifying the challenges to fragile states.

Contrary to those specialists who argue that the decline in the number of intrastate conflicts in the 1990s signaled an irreversible trend, this study does not concur. As the escalation in the numbers of intrastate conflicts between 2004 and 2008 and again in the Arab Spring demonstrates, these trends are far from unalterable. This is due to the fact that in many of the weak, very weak, and failing states discussed in this study protracted and deep seated struggles are taking place over political, social, and cultural values and visions. These internal cleavages between state and non-state groups and movements are not easily resolved. A range of political, religious, and cultural differences exist in fragile states that, as the Arab Spring demonstrated, can with little early warning result in serious violent and nonviolent challenges to state authority. In such situations, *human agency* can trump the political power and institutions of regimes that have been considered impervious to such challenges.

In sum, many of the fragile states identified in studies like the 2011 *Failed States Index* are vulnerable to internal challenges from both armed groups and civil resistance movements. This is because highly contentious politics with deep roots are at play within their borders. The environment generating these situations—the large number of weak, very weak, and failing states—will not wane any time soon. A decade into the 21st century, an

enduring pattern of irregular conflict is discernible. This trend is here to stay for the foreseeable future. It constitutes the prevalent pattern of instability and conflict.

The findings of this study have important implications for U.S. interests and national security policy in the decade ahead. The security challenges that weak states and armed groups pose will continue to have an impact on those interests and policies, and Washington will be unable to avoid these challenges. However, it will be much more cost effective for the U.S. to address these challenges if, as Secretary Gates proposed, it develops an “early intervention” approach. Such an approach would seem to dovetail with the Obama administration’s emerging “light footprint strategy,” with the intent of avoiding large U.S. military interventions around the world. Rather, this course of action will emphasize “caution, covert action and a modest American military footprint.” This new national security strategy for President Obama’s second term will seek to “limit American interventions, whenever possible, to drones, cyber-attacks, and Special Operations Forces,” all of which are seen as “low-cost, low-American-casualty tools.”¹¹⁸

This study proposes that to conduct both the “early engagement” and “light footprint strategy” effectively, Washington must develop a range of capabilities it currently does not have. The role of the DOD in this strategy as it relates to weak and/or transitioning states should focus on the twin missions of military-centric SSS and SSR. It can do so by fostering the development of capable and accountable military forces in weak states that can both protect and win the support of their population, and which are supervised by professional defense ministries.

To execute the twin missions of military-centric SSS and SSR, the U.S. will have to make a significant commitment to enhancing its SFA and DIB capabilities for assisting, training, and mentoring indigenous military forces and the institutions that manage them in weak states. To do so would entail developing and maintaining sufficient U.S. capabilities with the appropriate skill sets. But as this study found, existing forces, tools, and techniques needed to carry out these missions are either insufficient or missing from the inventory of the DOD.

Of those existing DOD capabilities, SOF are the most appropriate for executing SFA missions because of how they are organized, trained, and equipped to include regionally focused language and cultural skills. Since 9/11, they have been employed extensively on SFA missions that involve

indigenous force capacity building to meet irregular threats. But if SFA policy is to move in the direction proposed in this study, the number of SFA missions will expand because along with defense institution building, it will be raised to a core mission for the Pentagon.

In an era of persistent irregular conflict and the need for persistent engagement, SFA and DIB should be approached as strategic tools for managing irregular challenges to U.S. interests. This approach will increase the demand for a greater number of SFA missions. To meet that demand, the study found that three important steps have to be taken to develop the necessary capabilities.

First, existing SOF capabilities will have to be augmented with Army conventional forces. However, the existing approach for adapting conventional force BCTs for SFA missions, as established in FM 3-07.1 was found to be unlikely to produce the kinds of capacity and skill sets needed to successfully execute SFA missions. A new approach is needed if, as called for in the 2011 USSOCOM introductory guide for SFA, conventional army forces are to be employed to augment those of SOF to execute the growing demands of the geographical commands for more SFA missions to support their agendas for theater security cooperation, military engagement, and partner capacity building.

Next, while SOF retain robust skill sets to execute SFA missions, gaps and deficiencies are also present and have to be addressed if their SFA activities are to be broadened beyond military effectiveness to include accountability and reform. A broader SOF approach to SFA that encompasses these activities would introduce into their training regimen norms and standards that regulate civil-military relations in democratic systems. Included would be attention to such issues as democratic values, a clear chain of command, civilian oversight and control, a professional code of conduct, and rules of engagement that respect human rights and adhere to rule of law. These are the kinds of skill sets and capacity building assets that should be added to an expanded SFA mission for SOF.

Finally, a SFA and SSR strategy for early engagement must include DOD capabilities for strengthening and professionalizing the defense institutions that manage a host nation's military forces. Referred to as DIB within the Pentagon, this involves programs and processes employed by skilled advisors to develop effective, efficient, and accountable partner defense institutions to include civilian defense ministries, joint and general staffs and commands,

and supporting agencies. The core DIB activities revolve around fostering a civil-military relationship in which a civilian led defense institution exercises legitimate authority over the states military forces, overseeing and managing those forces within a legal-based framework that specifies duties, processes, and accountability. DIB is a key part of the broader approach to the SFA-SSR policy proposed in this study. To execute it, the DOD will require the development of a cadre of advisors who specialize in the key functional tasks of DIB. Modest steps have been taken to do so, but if DIB programs are to expand as proposed in this study, shortfalls in personnel with the appropriate skill sets will have to be addressed. ↑

Endnotes

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6. *Irregular Warfare (IW)-DOD Directive 3000.07* (December 1, 2008), p. 2.
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8. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–30.
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10. The Fund for Peace has developed content analysis framework—the Conflict Assessment Software Tool (CAST)—that is used as the basis for the annual *Failed State Index*, as well for "other applications including specific risk assessment, and in-depth national-, regional- and provincial-level analysis." CAST is employed to develop "in-depth assessments, country-by-country." This analysis, coupled with regional contextualization, provides a unique informational tool for policy-makers to identify serious pressures and to enact sensible, well-informed policies. For more information on this methodology and the computer techniques used "to scan thousands of news reports and track trends in pressures at the national and provincial levels" go to <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=contentanalysis>.
11. For more information on the Fund for Peace's country analysis indicators and how each is measured see their publication *Conflict Assessment Indicators* at <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/library/cr-10-97-ca-conflictassessmentindicators-1105c.pdf>.
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