FROM KINSHASA TO KANDAHAR: Canada and Fragile States in Historical Perspective
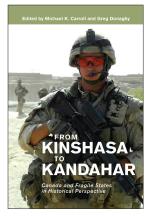Edited by Michael K. Carroll and Greg Donaghy

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CONCLUSION

Darren Brunk

In time and space, Kinshasa and Kandahar are worlds apart. More than five decades and almost 7,000 kilometres stand between Canada's abortive mission to reform the Armée Nationale Congolaise (ANC) in the early 1960s and the withdrawal of the last Canadian soldiers engaged in the reform of the Afghan National Army (ANA). Canada has travelled a circuitous route from one to the other—through Biafra and Bosnia, Timor Leste, Haiti, Colombia, Pakistan, and points in between. Since winding down its mission in Afghanistan, Canada has undertaken whole-of-government responses to conflict-driven crises in Libya, Ukraine, Mali, Sudan and South Sudan, and currently Iraq, to say nothing of the significant outlays of development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding assistance that it has contributed to multilateral efforts in many more countries.

So surely, after all this time and experience, it can be said with confidence that Canada does fragile states engagement well? Sadly, the all too frequent answer is "not yet."

While the reasons for failure—or lack of success—have varied from context to context, Canada's efforts have not led to sustainable changes in the metrics of what constitutes a functional liberal state. In 1960s Congo, the UN mission in which Canada participated was successful in achieving its mandate, but Canada, when repeatedly asked, did not finish the essential work of reforming the Congolese military. Canada thus must share

some of the blame for the Congo's predictable slide into Joseph Mobutu's long, authoritarian, and kleptocratic reign.

A similar story might be told of Canada's much later engagements in Bosnia and Afghanistan. In each instance, while Canada may point to its particular successes within the confines of a broader multilateral mission—in Bosnia as part of UNPROFOR and in Afghanistan as the ISAF lead in Kandahar—these Canadian successes cannot paper over the ultimate failures of the larger effort. In Duane Bratt's chapter on Bosnia, UNPROFOR may have carried out important aspects of its mandate to relieve the suffering of populations within the Bosnian conflict, but the mandate was never sufficient to end the conflict itself. Similarly, Stephen Saideman demonstrates that even the best whole-of-government efforts could not prevent Canada's eventual failure in Kandahar when domestic political calculations forced the premature end of Canadian engagement.

And in Biafra, Canada scarcely showed up at all. Popular humanitarian impulses were superseded by the Canadian government's more proximate concerns—notably the Quebec sovereignty issue. The government's non-interventionist position was hardened by the strident commentary of French officials. Ardent supporters of the separatist Biafrans and Quebecois, they equated the Canadian government's denial of Quebecois separatist claims to those of Nigeria in Biafra. On the balance sheet between Biafran suffering, on the one hand, and a maligned and introspective Canada, on the other, the Biafrans never stood a chance. As parliamentarians David MacDonald and Andrew Brewin reported succinctly in 1970, "there is an attitude of caution and . . . of weighing the views of our allies rather than the merits of the issue."[1]

MacDonald and Brewin might well have used the same language to describe Canada's belated support for the legitimate independence claims of East Timor. Whether as a conscious rhetorical device or a sincere informed assessment, the presumption of East Timor's claims to statehood—either as a lost cause or certain failure—made it far too easy for Canada to favour its interests in Indonesia over the merits of East Timor's case. In Haiti, Canada can point to a long history of on-again, off-again engagement. But in a country in which external shocks—economic or natural—are significant drivers of fragility, Canada has failed to recognize its place amongst these external forces. When Canada uses Haiti's internal fragility dynamics—weak institutions, corruption, poor governance—as a reason

to circumvent the state in its development efforts rather than as a reason to engage with it, Ottawa inadvertently reinforces the country's fragility. As David Webster succinctly explains, describing a similar dynamic in Canada's bilateral relationship with East Timor, why put your faith in the government of East Timor (or Haiti, or Afghanistan) when aid is branded with logos from Oxfam or USC Canada?

Based on these perspectives, success for Canada in its fragile state engagements has been elusive. There is a thread of failure running at least 7,000 kilometres through Canada's engagements in fragile states from Afghanistan to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and beyond. But are these the only lessons and interpretations that we should draw from this collection? Is the story of some of Canada's most significant efforts across many different contexts really as bleak as all this?

The Limits of the Evidence: Defining "Failure" and Measuring "Success" in Fragile Situations

The value of a comparative collection is that it allows us to look at Canada's experience across contexts and to compare trends, dynamics, and conclusions drawn from one context to the next. One trend across these case studies is clear: Canada's interventions have been incomplete. Canadian efforts have not, on their own or in the confines of larger missions, resolved the underlying root causes of the fragile situations with which they were engaged. However, this broad trend does not tell the whole story. As we scan across the different analyses, one notes that there are important distinctions between how authors interpret Canada's "failure" from one context to the next. When we interrogate these differences in interpretations, a more complex story of Canada's experiences emerges.

So, what has Canadian failure looked like? At one, very negative extreme, a failed engagement might mean doing "more harm than good" in an already fractious context. Given such a definition, Talisman's complicity in Sudanese war crimes might be a case in point, or, drawing on Andrew Thompson's analysis, Canada's post-Aristide engagement in Haiti. In East Timor and Biafra, Canada "failed" in part through inaction, but even this does not tell the whole story. In Biafra, the eventual humanitarian

response by Canadian civil society may in fact have contributed to the prolongation of the conflict and human suffering by maintaining supply lines through aid convoys that allowed Biafran separatists to carry on their struggle long after their defeat on the battlefield. In East Timor, Canada wasn't just a passive bystander to the suffering of the East Timorese; successive Canadian governments advocated against East Timor's independence claims and were close partners with Indonesia's Suharto regime—a partnership that included Canadian arms exports. In each case, the portrait painted of Canada's engagement is one of failure defined by Canadian actions that may have exacerbated the conditions of fragility—that is, failure by doing "more harm than good."

Alternately, "failure" might also be shorthand for suboptimal outcomes in situations where "we could have done more"; where an intervention in an already dire situation prevented the worst possible scenario from occurring, but where a more concerted or earlier intervention could have potentially resulted in more substantive, positive change. Such a definition of failure could apply in the DRC, Bosnia, and Afghanistan. In each instance, Canada mitigated some of the worst effects of a pre-existing crisis. But each time, the effort in which Canada participated was either too small in size or too narrow in scope to bring a sustainable end to the crisis by tackling deeper root and proximate causes.

Yet, if Canada should share responsibility for its "failure to do better," does this failure negate Canada's success in arresting or preventing the worst possible outcome? However we answer this question, it is clear that in even providing the space to ask the question, there is a qualitative difference between "failure to do better" and the far more absolute "more harm than good." "Failure to do better" is a distinct type of failure that is tinged with success, and in that respect is a very different result than doing "more harm than good."

When discussing fragile or failed states, these distinctions are more than semantics. Indeed, in many of today's most complex environments, it is hard to envision what, exactly, a successful Canadian engagement might look like. Could even an unlimited outlay of Canadian blood and treasure hope to achieve anything but a sub-optimal outcome in the face of expansive crises in Syria, Ukraine, Somalia, or present-day DRC? Even in such situations, however, action may still be warranted, justified by the sheer scale of human suffering, or as a sub-optimal stopgap to protect Canada's

domestic security or commercial interests. In these situations of foreseeable failure, Canada can still choose to act. In such situations, external actors can still aspire to limit or reduce the worst possible outcomes, even if these best efforts are never likely to resolve—or even come close to tackling—root and proximate causes. In such instances where a sub-optimal outcome is acceptable, understanding the degree of failure we are willing to accept as "good enough" becomes an important policy question.[2]

In fragile and failed states, international efforts can expect to be hampered by the effects of war or an otherwise broken social contract. There is often a flood of weapons and armed groups with entrenched hatreds and grievances, or powerful commercial and political interests; there are other informal power brokers and economic actors happy to work outside the regulatory structure of the state; there are psychologically and physically damaged individuals in divided and dislocated communities; and there are frequently external state or non-state actors with their own stake in ensuring that state sovereignty in neighbouring territories remains weak. Across this arduous terrain, a fledgling state must somehow outcompete these rival sites of power, authority, and legitimacy. In such environments, is a functioning state a level of success toward which outside actors should aspire, or to which they can be fairly held to account? If this maximalist state-building objective is not a realistic standard in the most complex environments, what, then, should be the ultimate benchmark for success?

Moreover, as the chapters of this collection illustrate, the particular conditions of "fragility" and "failure" vary widely from one context to the next. As David Webster and Tom Keating remind us, the invocation of the terms "failure" and "fragility" can all too often be used as a politically expedient rhetorical tool, used variously to legitimize Canadian policy decisions both for and against intervention. For Keating, in the post–Cold War era, the concept of "state failure" is an echo of the nineteenth-century "Standard of Civilization," evoking the right and responsibility of Western states to intervene in the sovereign affairs of states failing to live up to the dominant liberal-democratic state standards. In quite a different rhetorical role, in East Timor, the power of the term was used to reinforce a policy of inaction by framing East Timor as a context predestined for failure. When and why these terms are invoked always requires a healthy dose of critical reflection.

Even where fragility and failure may have some resonance in describing very real dynamics, the concepts do not always apply in the same way in all contexts. In Pakistan and Colombia, fragility, to the extent that it exists, appears as a localized mistrust in the legitimacy and representativeness of state institutions. It is manifested through marginalized regions and populations alienated by how and for whom the state chooses to project its power, rather than a concern with its lack of capacity. For instance, as Julian Schofield contends, "Pakistan is not a failed state . . . but a state with a feeble developmental priority, in which there is a general unwillingness to provide a social-political framework in which citizens can meet their basic needs." In Bosnia and East Timor, however, the state may enjoy fairly wide legitimacy, but the fragility challenge lies in building and extending the state's weak capacity. In Nigeria, Afghanistan, the DRC, and Haiti, the challenge is more likely a mixture of both.

If indeed the concept of fragility exists on a spectrum that requires a degree of tailoring in terms of its applicability from one context to the next, notions of failed or successful engagements should also exist along a correlated spectrum. The question of success is intrinsically linked to the concept of failure and fragility; we cannot know what constitutes an appropriate dosage of the cure if we cannot agree on the nature or extent of the ailment. In this respect, Keating is right when he argues that we must be conscious of the biases of what we consider to be the "state ideal" at the "successful" pole of the state fragility spectrum. The ideal type of the functional state at one end of the spectrum is as flawed as the ideal type of failure at the other end. Our ideal types of "success" and "failure" along this spectrum should be equally dynamic and critically reflective.

The Next 7,000 Kilometres: Where Does Canada Go from Here?

Though the conditions of fragility that Canada is likely to meet in its next overseas challenge may differ from the experiences found in the past, what lessons can this collection offer to help improve on future engagements? Three recurrent themes in particular stand out across the cases explored.

First, it is necessary to take the "state" out of "fragile states." It is entirely unhelpful and unreflective of reality to speak of fragile states; in our theoretical understanding and real-world engagements with fragility, we need to decouple the concept of "fragility" from the state. Traditional notes of state sovereignty have negatively influenced our ability to understand and effectively address fragile situations. For example, the states of Colombia and Pakistan may be resilient and quite strong in some aspects of their governance and legitimacy, and in specific geographic regions. Moreover, questions of whether or not the state itself is failed or fragile are indeed vital insofar as they help us determine the extent to which the state should be a focus of our responses to fragile situations. However, policymakers must be careful not to allow a focus on the durability and stability of the state *itself* to distract them from considering how to best respond to situations of fragility, however localized, within the boundaries of a particular state.

The economic, social, and political drivers, and dynamics of instability in Pakistan's Swat region, or the ongoing prevalence of armed criminal gangs in many of Colombia's provinces and cities, do pose significant threats to regional and international peace and security. But as Schofield argues, the complex origins of these localized crises require more than disconnected and disjointed development or military responses; they require an integrated approach drawing on the full range of political, civilian, and military security, and development tools essential for any fragile state engagement. This being the case, whether the state of Pakistan is itself at risk is secondary to the far more fundamental threat posed by fragility to significant populations within the country, and potentially to Canada's external interests. However important an actor and stakeholder is in addressing drivers of fragility, our tendency to treat the state as the principal referent object of fragility or failure is often misplaced.

Second, the collection emphasizes the vital role that Canadian national interests—be they electoral calculations, federalist tensions, or commercial and other domestic interests—play in influencing Canada's policies around engagements in fragile states and in helping to determine the depth and durability of Canada's commitment to those engagements. Traditional realist commercial and foreign policy calculations may have been at play in dissuading Canadian action in the face of compelling moral claims by the East Timorese. Geopolitical worries over relations with an

emerging group of decolonizing states inhibited Canadian willingness to operate outside the confines of a UN mandate in the DRC. Fears that the success of secessionist movements abroad might encourage Quebec separatist claims at home led Canada to privilege approaches that reinforced the integrity of the central state—for example, in Nigeria. And electoral calculations clearly shaped Canada's engagement strategy in Afghanistan.

Though in each case the decisive Canadian "interest" varied, the trend apparent across the chapters is that domestic preoccupations are important determinants in how governments define the objectives, scope, and timelines for Canadian engagement. Though the influence of domestic interests may seem obvious in principle, Canadian fragile state policymaking has done little to date to account for this domestic dynamic in practice. Effective fragile state policymaking must better account for the permissive environment in Canada that underpins its sustainability.

Canadians were moved by scenes of human suffering in Biafra, Bosnia, East Timor, and Haiti. Moreover, in these instances, Canadians mobilized to act—either through government or their own collective action. Canadians were particularly aggrieved to see their own companies—especially in the extractive sector—doing "more harm than good" in Sudan, the Americas, and elsewhere. As Hevina Dashwood explains, an entire segment of Canadian civil society has emerged to hold Canadian companies accountable for their actions overseas, notably in fragile situations. Clearly, Canadians have the will to see their government and civil society engage. Yet public discourse has rarely examined the depth of Canadians' collective will to do fragile states engagement "right." This conscious shift in public discourse must occur if we are to improve the results of our engagements in fragile states.

Canadian policy discussion and development around fragile states must be more honest about the political appetite for intervention. Such a policy shift necessarily requires a much more frank debate within government and in public about the sacrifices Canadians are prepared to make if Canada is to move beyond the minimalist realm of "we could have done more" toward more expensive, maximalist "successful" fragile state engagement. This is the fundamental challenge that Tom Keating raises when he writes, "Canadian policy has demonstrated ongoing support for favouring international interventions to rescue failed states; yet . . . in practice this has often meant selectively supporting a minimal

degree of international intervention at little real cost over the long term." Canada has the knowledge and resources to improve on its fragile state engagements; Keating's challenge underlines the other essential, often overlooked aspect of the equation: can Canada muster the necessary collective *will* to see engagements through to the tough standards of success that have proved so elusive in the past?

Long-term projects, at least, offer a skeptical Canadian public the promise of an unambiguously laudable outcome. Mobilizing political will becomes infinitely harder, however, when Canadians are asked to lend their support to morally ambiguous standards of success. No one knows this more than former Supreme Court justice Louise Arbour, who has also served as chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, as well as UN high commissioner for human rights. For over two decades, she has been at the heart of pioneering efforts to bring justice to victims of conflict in fragile states around the world. Yet she has recently questioned the maximalist standards often used to assess success for interventionist efforts. "There is a basic flaw in the international effort to simultaneously pursue justice, peace and human rights," she recently said in an interview. "The negotiation of a lasting peace often requires a delaying, or forgiving, of justice. . . . What I'm trying to promote, maybe as a way out of this, is the idea of a kind of political empathy as a strategic advantage. Not as a sentimental, do-gooder virtue . . . but something that is sustained and has a capacity to genuinely try to understand what an issue looks like from an opponent's or from another party's point of view—a blueprint for understanding before you act, as opposed to rushing into things."[3]

Even if we find the alchemy to conjure a stronger political will, Canadian engagements might still founder on the divisive rocks of domestic national interest. As Carleton University historian Norman Hillmer reminds us, "the national interest is a slippery beast."[4] It is always hard to reconcile diverse Canadian foreign policy and national interests around a particular fragile state engagement. In the DRC, Ottawa's desire to bolster such multilateral security fora as the UN and its interest in positioning Canada favourably among the newly decolonized states provided just enough political will to justify Canada's initial commitment to the ONUC. But this same rationale—fear of upsetting the decolonized block of countries at the UN and undermining the UN as an effective multilateral body—was

later used to dissuade Canada from engaging in ANC reform outside a UN-sanctioned mission. Even with strong domestic political will, Canadian fragile state engagements will not automatically improve. It will be more important and tougher to untangle the web of interconnected interests that enable and constrain the form of an engagement, even within the perfect permissive environment.

Third and finally, lest we believe that the prognosis for engagement in fragile states is all doom and gloom, there are also more positive conclusions to be drawn from this collection. In particular, Canada has shown a capacity and willingness to change and adapt its practice over time. The MacDonald-Brewin report, the Harker Commission, and the Canadian-initiated International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) all led to important policy discussions and, frequently, significant changes in how the government of Canada approached subsequent engagements in fragile states. Contrast, for example, the limited military mission Canada undertook as part of the UN Operation in the Congo to the multifaceted "comprehensive approach" Canada adopted as part of the NATO-ISAF mission in Afghanistan. In Kandahar, Canada was present on the ground with a much broader array of tools and practices than could ever have been conceived in 1960s Congo. Embedded in the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, Canada's Afghan mission included a significant military presence to train and assist the ANA; political expertise to build government institutions and to navigate the thorny political challenge of bringing together divergent actors within a shared state framework; civilian policing expertise to build local security capacity; and a sizable development program building the foundations for Afghanistan to carry out its own state-building project.

Moreover, far from being a static mission, Canada altered its techniques in Afghanistan as it went. As Saideman rightly notes, the "comprehensive approach" adopted in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2011 was not without its serious challenges. Recognizing these shortcomings, the government made significant efforts to review its failures and develop solutions. The Manley Report was one important effort in this respect. As the report concluded, many of these operational shortcomings exhibited in the "comprehensive" approach made it clear that in order for "whole of government" approaches to work in practice, it was also essential to embed a stronger culture and infrastructure of interdepartmental cooperation

and coordination in Ottawa, where it could inform government strategy before separate ministries and departments arrived in the field. Nowhere was the learning curve in Afghanistan steeper than in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), which, as Saideman points out, "had little experience in mounting expeditions of this kind and facilitating governance." Acknowledging the need to develop these critical abilities, DFAIT established a dedicated centre of policy, program, deployment, and coordination expertise, specifically designed to improve Canada's engagements in fragile and conflict-affected states—the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START). DFAIT was a pioneer in developing these new fragile state–specific tools.

Of course, Canada is not learning on its own. There is a much-improved global understanding of how Western nations have collectively failed in the past and of the basic principles that must guide engagements in the future. One of the first notable achievements in this regard came in 2004, when major donor states within the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) formed the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), a donor initiative established so that contributors can monitor and assess their engagements in fragile and conflict-affected states. To date, INCAF has helped inform the international community's first best-practice standard for effective peacebuilding, articulated in the 2007 ten Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations (Fragile States Principles).[5]

Since the founding of INCAF, a growing range of stakeholders—including fragile state and non-traditional donor governments—have added their voices to these learning exercises, most notably through such policy and advocacy bodies as the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding ("the Dialogue") and the g7+ group of fragile state governments. Together, the members of the Dialogue and the g7+ crafted the "New Deal" for engagement in fragile states, which outlines a series of best-practice commitments to be undertaken by both fragile state governments *and* their international partners. Like the Fragile States Principles, the New Deal re-emphasizes the twin pillars of local context and coherence of effort. However, as a set of "best practice" commitments drafted in part by fragile states themselves, the New Deal exemplifies—just as it adds a layer of detail and operational relevance to—the commitments to context and coherence outlined in the Fragile State Principles. This emerging

body of knowledge and consensus around fragile state good practice raises the prospect that Canada's next significant engagement will be better than the last, and that Canadians and the international community will be much better equipped to challenge the Canadian approach where it fails to live up to clearly defined standards.[6]

Seven thousand kilometres stretch between Kinshasa and Kandahar. And yet, when one looks at the record of Canadian engagements in fragile states along the road from one to the next, it's hard to know—just how far have we travelled? Both the DRC and Afghanistan would be strong candidates today for Canada's next fragile states engagement. In that important respect, perhaps the distance is not as far as we'd like to think. No doubt, looking at the historical record, Canada's efforts have not, as a general rule, resulted in sustainable, resilient, and peaceful countries. At times, Canadian engagement may well have worsened conflict, instability, and human rights conditions in already fragile situations. And yet, while our successes may not have been fully realized, neither have our failures always been so complete. In notable cases, Canadian actions have contributed to the alleviation of suffering, a reduction in armed conflict, and the strengthening of weak institutions. All too frequently, Canada has left its important work incomplete or unfinished.

Though results to date have been imperfect, there is still good reason to believe that, under the right conditions, Canada can make a positive contribution through its fragile states engagements. If this statement is true, then it prompts the critical question: what *are* the right conditions? This collection points toward some possible answers. Establishing the right conditions for engagement begins at home, in Canada. The process starts by assessing, as part of the public discourse, whether Canadians are prepared to see a particular commitment through, based on clear, results-based benchmarks for when Canada can and should consider the job done. What benchmarks are Canadians prepared to accept as the standard of success? Is it enough to carry on as has been done in the past, accepting that we "failed to do more," but at the very least having avoided the worst possible outcome? Or is the "Canadian standard" for fragile states engagement going to be something more—a standard that aims at a fundamental change in the political, economic, and social conditions of a state or region, where Canadians can say "fragility is no more"? If Canadians, as a result of this discussion around a prospective engagement, cannot be

confident of achieving this high standard of success, what then? When is it enough to accept the minimalist "could have done more" alternative?

This collection does not provide ready answers to these tough questions, but it clearly demonstrates the need for the discussion. Canada has long engaged fragile states and will doubtless continue to do so. Let us start the discussion now, using the evidence and lessons from this volume as a point of departure. For, tomorrow or the next day, we will surely see new crises and conflicts that will trouble our collective conscience. Canadians will write to their public officials to learn what Canada intends to do. Policymakers will gather to consider what Canada can do. Government ministers will weigh the gravity of the situation against Canada's interests and the appetite of the Canadian voter before deciding what we will do. Before we engage in the next fragile situation, let us be confident that throughout this decision-making process we are, all of us, sharing a discussion around hard questions over what Canada should do. We need to get this conversation right. Seven thousand kilometres is a long way to travel for nothing.

Notes

1   Andrew Brewin and David MacDonald, *Canada and the Biafran Tragedy* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1970), 135.

2   For a fuller exploration of the debate around the distinctions of success and failure in fragile and failed states, see, for example, Charles Call and Vanessa Wyeth, eds., *Building States to Build Peace* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008).

3   Doug Saunders, "Why Louise Arbour is thinking twice," *Globe and Mail*, 28 March 2015.

4   Norman Hillmer, "National Independence and the National Interest: O. D. Skelton's Department of External Affairs in the 1920s," in Greg Donaghy and Michael K. Carroll, *In the National Interest: Canadian Foreign Policy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1909–2009* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2010), 11.

5   OECD-INCAF, "Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations," http://www.oecd.org/development/conflictandfragility/effectiveengagementinfragilestates.htm (accessed 7 November 2012).

Note: The Fragile State Principles are: 1) Take context as the starting point; 2) Do no harm; 3) Focus on state building as the central objective; 4) Prioritize prevention; 5) Recognize the links between political, security and development objectives; 6) Promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies;

7) Align with local priorities in different ways in different contexts; 8) Agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors; 9) Act fast … but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance; and 10) Avoid pockets of exclusion.

6   World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, 185, http://go.worldbank.org (accessed 7 November 2012).