



FROM KINSHASA TO KANDAHAR: Canada and Fragile States in Historical Perspective
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**RESPONDING TO FAILED
AND FRAGILE STATES:
The Evolution of Canadian Policy**

Tom Keating

Introduction

In February 2008, the Kosovo parliament issued a unilateral declaration of independence from the Federated Republic of Serbia. Within hours, the independence of Kosovo was recognized by the United States. Six weeks later, the Canadian government joined the Americans and a few dozen other states in announcing its own recognition of the independence of Kosovo. The Canadian government stated that Kosovo was a “very unique” situation that carried no implications for other separatist movements at home or abroad, but Dragan Ciric of the Canadian Serbian League expressed a different concern: “My only thought is that by this decision, Canada just supported one more failed state, and I didn’t think that that’s a goal of Canadian foreign policy.”¹ The Canadian government’s recognition of Kosovo was perhaps inevitable, given Ottawa’s participation in the 1999 air war against Serbia and its support for the subsequent joint United Nations–North Atlantic Treaty Organization (UN–NATO)

occupation of Kosovo established in June 1999. The government had long since decided that the sovereignty of the former Republic of Yugoslavia had to be violated as the state had failed to protect vulnerable segments of its population. The initial intervention against Serbia in March 1999 also demonstrated a willingness to use NATO as the institutional authority to legitimize the intervention, confirming Canada's new willingness to use military force to intervene in failed states. The effort in Kosovo had been foreshadowed by practices in places such as Iraq, Somalia, and Haiti, and has been followed by interventions in Afghanistan and, more recently, Libya, where outside agents, sometimes at the expense of local authorities, have been empowered to take on the country's administration and security needs. These interventions have been part of a long-term, post-Second World War policy of support for more intrusive international rules and practices that constrain the authority of sovereign states that have failed to meet standards of practice defined by the international community.

The discourse on "failed states" within both the academic community and policy circles is a recent one.² While there is clearly a long history to what we now call failed states, it would seem that the concept entered into policy discourses in an explicit and significant manner only since the end of the Cold War, and even more dramatically after the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001. A quick scan of the Factiva database is revealing in this respect. The notion is not found in databases prior to 1990, but appears with increased frequency as one moves through the 1990s (122 times between 1990 and 1995 and 373 mentions between 1996 and 2000), and then increases exponentially in the 2000s (3,401 mentions between 2001 and 2005 and more than 8,000 between 2006 and 2012.) The term has become ubiquitous in many discussions on development, civil conflict, and terrorism. It might appear from this that failed states are unique to the post-Cold War period and have not existed in the past. Perhaps, however, the circumstances that have given rise to the contemporary policy concern for failed states are also a reflection of the broader international context in which these states have emerged. Instead of being a mere backdrop, failed states have moved to the foreign policy centre, a shift that may help to account for the policy responses that have been taken by the Canadian and other governments in response to the phenomenon. The intense attention given to failed states in recent years suggests that factors other than those existing within particular states may be

driving Canadian government policy. Indeed, it will be argued here, and elsewhere throughout this collection, that Canadian governments have had a long-standing interest in “failed states” and that policy in response to these states has been influenced more by the broader international environment than by the specific conditions that exist within particular failed states.

This chapter examines the evolution of successive Canadian governments’ policies toward failed states in an effort to understand how and why such states have emerged as a significant focus of attention for Canadian foreign policy, attracting the attention of diplomats, development experts, and defence analysts alike. It also explores the mix of domestic and external factors that have shaped Canadian policy in this area and suggests that shifting concerns related both to matters of international security and to international order have largely accounted for the shifts in Canadian policy in this area. In the end, the particular conditions that have given rise to failed states seem to be of less significance and thus might account for the very limited commitments that the government has been willing to undertake in order to redress the conditions that foster failed states in the contemporary system.

It is useful to consider failed states in a broader historical context because it can help better to define both the nature of failed states and how the range of policy responses that have been adopted have varied over time. Scholarly and media attention since the late 1990s aside, it is worth noting that failed states are best viewed as a phenomenon of the late twentieth century. This view is based on Robert Jackson’s arguments about the rise of quasi-states in the post–Second World War wave of decolonization.³ It would appear that for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sovereignty was seldom granted to states that failed to demonstrate their effectiveness, their capacity to govern domestically through whatever means employed, and their ability to defend their territory with varying degrees of success over time. One could, for example, consider Canada’s own difficult and incremental road to gaining international recognition for its sovereignty. A prominent issue for much of the nineteenth century was the effort of dominant European states to establish “standards of civilization” to control which political entities would gain access to international forums and equal treatment under international law. Statehood was something to be earned, both at home and in the eyes

of European powers. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 provided one of the early breakthroughs against the stranglehold that European powers held over defining these international norms.⁴

These practices were challenged in dramatic fashion with the attempt to establish the principle of self-determination as part of the settlement at Versailles in 1919, and more significantly with the wave of decolonization that swept the Global South after the Second World War. Particularly noteworthy in this regard was the UN General Assembly's 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Resolution 1514), which stated that "inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence."⁵ The resolution received widespread support and set the stage for the acceleration of decolonization and the establishment of new sovereign states, some of which lacked the capacity to provide the range of functions generally associated with state sovereignty. Contemporary definitions of failed or fragile states stand in glaring contrast to the sentiments of UNGA Resolution 1514. For example, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) offers the following assessment:

Though no universal definition of "fragile state" exists, states are perceived as fragile when the government does not demonstrate the will and/or capacity to deliver on core state functions such as the enforcement of legitimate security and authority, *the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights and gender equality, the rule of law, and even the most basic provision of services (e.g., in health and education, in enabling the private sector, and in environmental protection)*. When these core state functions are unreliable or inaccessible, the legitimacy of the state erodes and is likely to result in a breakdown in the social "pact" of trust and cooperation within civil society and between civil society and the state.⁶ [Emphasis added.]

Two aspects of this definition are worth noting. First, a comparison with the words of Resolution 1514 indicates that those characteristics which place a state in the failed or fragile category would now prevent it from

securing its independence, sovereignty, and the recognition and diplomatic support of the international community. Yet just a few decades ago such “trivial” concerns as providing basic services to the population were not considered important enough to delay the granting of statehood to colonial territories. Second, the italicized passage demonstrates the degree to which liberal values have now entered into the characteristics considered necessary for a state to be considered legitimate. Such requirements are reminiscent of those employed by European powers as “standards of civilization” in the nineteenth century.

These are points worth returning to, but for the moment it is important to keep in mind that the characteristics of statehood were redefined as a result of pressures for decolonization in the post-World War II period. As such, the current preoccupation with failed states may suggest that the global community is in the midst of another redefinition of statehood and state sovereignty. If so, then perhaps the issue is not one of failed states as much as how the characteristics of statehood and state sovereignty are to be determined, and once determined, how they are to be applied to all of those entities that already have been granted sovereign statehood. If this is what surrounds the various practices and discourses of failed states, then this needs to be part of the conversation to demonstrate why a state that met the standards for sovereignty—and hence non-intervention—that were set out and adopted fifty years ago, is today subject to intervention.

A Survey of Canadian Policy

Adopting a broader view of failed states than is usually found in the literature, one can find evidence that Canadian officials have been concerned about failed or failing states since long before the term came into vogue in the 1990s. There have been four phases of heightened concern on the part of Canadian officials for what we now call failed states, reflecting, at least in part, different international and institutional environments and, to a lesser degree, different domestic ones, as well. These phases do not appear to be distinctive or exclusive, as there are some important and interesting commonalities across them. Nor are they completely time-bound, though that is the initial distinction made here.

The first phase can be seen in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and applied as much to Western Europe as it did to the states rising out of colonialism in the Global South. In this phase, the Canadian government's policy was shaped by its alliance commitments and Cold War fears. States made fragile by the effects of the war, or states in the early stages of independence and confronting domestic unrest and economic instability, might not only fail, but, more alarmingly in the context of the times, fall prey to Communist governments and align with the Soviet bloc. It was essentially a concern that states might "fail" to remain both economically and politically secure and within the Western camp. The critical point, for this discussion, was the concern displayed for the capacity of these governments to govern. The primary source of this capacity gap was assumed to be economic, but the support of Western states was also seen as necessary to provide an important element of moral support to governments confronting domestic or external unrest. The response was rather straightforward. It involved giving financial and technical assistance to national governments so that they could withstand the economic and political turmoil created by the war's end and the first stages of independence. Participation in the Marshall Plan and the Colombo Plan are illustrative of Canadian policy in this period. The degree to which this was accompanied by more overt forms of intervention tended to vary. The US-led Marshall Plan, for instance, attached conditions to its support for the European countries, designed to encourage both liberalization and internal cooperation. Such conditions were not explicitly imposed as part of the Colombo Plan, though forms of technical assistance in areas such as governance, public order, and military training constituted more interventionist practices than is usually acknowledged.⁷

Canadian policy during this period was influenced more by Canada's position in the Western alliance and the British Commonwealth than by concerns about any specific state, let alone a humanitarian concern for individuals living within these states. In retirement, former secretary of state for external affairs and prime minister Lester Pearson lamented the fact that Cold War security concerns had led the Canadian government to adopt a development assistance policy that it should have adopted for other—more humanitarian—reasons. "It is a sorry commentary on the postwar period that without them [the Soviets and Chinese] and the threat which they represent we might not so readily have done what we should

have been doing anyway.”⁸ Such concerns continued to play a role in Canadian development assistance policy to the point where aid was sometimes considered an extension of national security policy and development assistance as something akin to defence contributions to NATO.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, there is evidence of a second phase in Canadian policy in response to the emergence of new states in the Global South as decolonization accelerated. The end of the European empires posed a significant challenge to regional and international peace and security. The armed conflicts in Cyprus, the Congo, Vietnam, and Nigeria are examples of this, as a combination of nationalist aspirations, economic uncertainty and inequality, and ethnic differences became the source of intra- and inter-state conflict, the latter largely involving Western colonial powers. These conflicts also created instability between the superpowers as they jockeyed for influence over these new states. Much of Canada’s policy response to decolonization at this time was influenced by, and conducted through, the UN and the Commonwealth in the form of participation in UN peacekeeping operations, economic assistance programs, and the politics of recognition. Indeed, the Canadian government orchestrated a reform of UN admission practices in 1955 that eased the way for newly independent states to join the organization. There was a good deal of concern for facilitating the integration of these newly independent states into the UN framework and, where appropriate, the Commonwealth.

Another important consideration shaping Canadian policy was domestic in nature. By the 1960s, the postwar consensus on foreign policy had begun to collapse, as the public debated Canada’s role in the world and the independence of Canadian diplomacy. The growing influence of the media interest in foreign policy created expectations for action that Ottawa felt compelled to meet. This was evident, for example, in the government’s reaction to the crisis over Biafra in Nigeria.⁹

While Canada’s response to decolonization was heavily influenced by its alliance membership and corresponding connections with colonial powers—Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal—its specific concern over the possibility of failed states resulting from such a process was reflected in its position on Resolution 1514, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Unlike its principal allies, and despite their pressure to abstain on the resolution, the Canadian delegation at the UN supported Resolution 1514. Canadian support was not



Figure 1: Secretary of State for External Affairs Howard Green broke with Canada's Western allies to support strongly Afro-Asian decolonization and UN Resolution 1514 in the early 1960s. (Credit: UN 62975)

an indication that they were ignorant of the looming problems that these newly independent states might encounter or pose to regional and international order. Indeed, the Congo had already clearly demonstrated the potential pitfalls, and these fears were duly noted by government officials.

Howard Green, Progressive Conservative secretary of state for external affairs from 1959 to 1963, however, recognized that the weight of opinion had shifted to ending colonialism in a manner that would solidify the majority position of African and other former colonies in both the UN and the Commonwealth. Green took the view "that on colonial questions the newly independent states often viewed an abstention as the same as a vote against." Additionally, if Canadians were "to have any influence, then, it would be best to vote in favour of certain resolutions, even if they were somewhat unpalatable. Then, from this 'position of seeming alignment' with the Afro-Asians, Canada would be in a position 'to demonstrate sympathy with those countries with whom we do in fact sympathize, and

to give encouragement to those elements we wish to encourage.”¹⁰ It is doubtful that this influence ever amounted to a great deal, but on balance the desire to avoid being on the wrong side of history by resisting resolutions strongly supported by these newly independent states convinced the government to abandon its principal allies and back the resolution.

Once it accepted the principle that decolonization should lead directly to sovereignty, the Canadian government applied the principle of non-intervention, even in instances where the legitimacy of the state had been called into question. This was certainly a consideration in the reaction of Liberal prime minister Pierre Trudeau’s government to the conflict in Nigeria in the late 1960s. It remained important throughout the 1970s and was a consideration in shaping the Trudeau government’s policy toward liberation movements in southern Africa. Domestic fears about rising Quebec nationalism and resulting pressures for separatism reinforced the government’s support for the principle of non-intervention. Trudeau was especially determined to avoid precedents that could be used to undermine Canadian sovereignty. Failing or failed states could rely on the Canadian government’s formal recognition and adherence to a policy of non-intervention. There was also the continued support of development assistance programs, which were still generally funnelled through national governments, adding further legitimacy to these regimes.

A shift in Canadian policy and a third phase began in the waning days of the Cold War, when Trudeau’s successor, Progressive Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney, adopted a good governance policy and sought to export this policy through its development assistance programs, its efforts at standard-setting in international institutions, and its support for interventions under the auspices of these bodies. This change in Canadian policy pre-dated, but overlapped with and was reinforced by, the new wave of state creation and democratization that occurred at the end of the Cold War; the former Yugoslavia became a significant starting point for Canada’s new policy. The rapid end of the Cold War facilitated the pursuit of these policy shifts within multilateral institutions. The approach was overtly and explicitly interventionist, and, while initially limited to diplomatic and development assistance policy, it soon took the form of military interventions operating under the authority and auspices of the UN, NATO, and the Organization of American States, as the failing states of Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Haiti respectively slipped into disarray. Each



Figure 2: By the early 1990s, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney had explicitly embraced the promotion of good governance and human rights as key elements in an interventionist response to state fragility. (Credit: Peter Bregg)

of these interventions carried with it a different rationale and mandate, but they collectively helped shape a conditional approach toward sovereignty and a growing acceptance of the legitimacy of intervention, including the use of armed force.

Prime Minister Mulroney's interventionist approach had some precursors in the practice of conditionality that had been integrated into Canadian development assistance policy in the 1980s, which was designed to influence economic and political practices in the recipient state. The human rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the successful Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, US president Jimmy Carter's support for human rights, and the discourse of rights associated with Trudeau's constitutional changes in the 1980s generated popular support for this interventionist policy. The international context was, of course, vitally important, as the end of the Cold War and the accompanying democratic consensus influenced many into thinking that democracy, the rule of

law, human rights, and free markets would prevail around the globe, and should be encouraged with more overt forms of support.¹¹

It was at this time that explicit references to failed states begin to appear in both academic and policy discourse alongside human security as a guiding principle for how to respond to these failed states. The increased attention directed toward human rights and the protection of civilians, integral to the notion of human security, made the conditions within failed states that much more of a concern to policymakers and an interested public. The term “failed states” appears, for example, in the Liberal government’s 1994 White Paper on defence. In describing “failed states,” this document observes that “the breakdown of authority in certain states is another source of instability. It is characterized by chaos, violence and the inability of political leaders to provide the population with the most basic of services.” The White Paper turns almost immediately to a discussion of regional conflict along more traditional inter-state lines, but the flag had been raised over failed states. Moreover, the defence white paper made it clear that this was not simply, or primarily, a matter of serving the national interest: “Even where Canada’s interests are not directly engaged, the values of Canadian society lead Canadians to expect their government to respond when modern communication technologies make us real-time witnesses to violence, suffering and even genocide in many parts of the world.”¹² As is evident here, there is little reference to, or concern for, Canadian national security interests as it involves failed states throughout the 1990s. If the effects on Canada are expressed, it is more as an affront to Canadian values.

The decade closed with NATO’s armed attack on Serbia to protect the non-Serb population of Kosovo. This intervention, conducted with extensive military force and without the authority of the UN Security Council, presented a challenge to Canadian policy, which had tended to favour operations under UN auspices. It also marked one of the more overt efforts to construct a new sovereign entity out of an existing state that the international community had determined had failed, though not so much on the grounds of capacity as on legitimacy. The intervention also demonstrated the increased significance of human rights practices and the introduction of considerations other than a state’s capacity to maintain order.

Canadian policymakers concerned about the precedents set by the Kosovo intervention were instrumental in establishing the International

Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), an ad hoc body of UN members under Australian politician Gareth Evans and Algerian diplomat Mohamed Sahnoun. The commission was asked to develop a set of principles to govern how states and the international community would respond to nations that failed to exercise their responsibilities to their own citizens. In advancing the idea of “responsibility to protect,” the international commission advocated for intervention in failed states, and began to redefine the requirements of sovereignty. The ICISS report insisted on “a modern understanding of the meaning of sovereignty” that was clearly different from that expressed in UNGA Resolution 1514 and included much closer attention to the treatment of civilian populations. During this phase, Canada’s approach was clearly guided by a concern to promote liberal values and practices in both the political and economic spheres. There was also considerable support for intervention of a direct and overt sort, though ideally conducted through multilateral associations—the UN, regional organizations, or NATO. While interventions were obviously not possible in every state that failed to meet democratic standards, protect human rights, and support free market principles, it remained unclear how to determine the appropriateness of intervention.

The fourth and most recent phase in Canadian policy toward failed states occurred after the terrorist attacks against the United States in September 2001. In the wake of the attacks, the United States identified failed states as its principal security threat, a view with which many in Canada agreed. The US National Security Strategy of 2003 boldly stated that “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones,”¹³ a refrain echoed less dramatically in the International Policy Statement released by Prime Minister Paul Martin’s Liberal government in 2005: “Failed and failing states dot the international landscape, creating despair and regional instability and providing a haven for those who would attack us directly.”¹⁴

These concerns were repeated in the government’s defence policy statement, winning favour with some commentators. Alex Wilner, a senior research fellow at the Macdonald Laurier Institute, contended that “Canada’s policy toward fragile political environments must evolve in kind, so that intervention is based less on the promotion of good governance, human rights, and social justice and more on the hard realities of Canadian security and national interest. The post-9/11 era demands



Figure 3: Prime Minister Paul Martin’s government released its International Policy Statement in April 2005, underlining the threat posed by failed and failing states after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. (Credit: Dave Chan)

that Canadian foreign policy align itself more wholly with emerging international security prospects and their related strategic concerns.”¹⁵ At the same time, others, including political scientist Rob Huebert, questioned such an interpretation, writing that “attempting to explain contemporary terrorism only as a result of failed and failing states is incomplete at best and simply wrong at worst.”¹⁶ In response, the Martin government insisted that responding to failed states was not a policy option motivated solely or primarily by humanitarian considerations. It remained unclear, however, how one was to distinguish between those failed states that might be a threat and those that were not. Significantly, one begins to see how the perception of a threat arising from a particular state influences the tendency of policymakers to consider and label that state as failed. In other words, failed states are those states that pose a direct or, in most cases, indirect security threat to Canada.

In summary, these different periods of Canadian response to failed states suggest a mix of concerns, which have seemingly come full circle since Ottawa was first alerted to the challenge emanating from failed states in the 1950s. Three sets of concerns have informed policy. First, the government has worried about security, when failed states represent a direct threat to Canadian interests. This is where policy originated from a concern for the spread of Communist regimes and where it returned in the 2000s out of concern for the spread of terrorism or bases from which terrorists might operate. Second, successive Canadian governments have promoted a liberal, humanitarian world order that has focused on bringing these failed states to a “better” position, where human rights and good governance are respected. Such considerations were most prevalent in the later 1980s and 1990s, when they were informed by the human security initiatives of Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien and his foreign minister, Lloyd Axworthy. Third, Canadian policymakers have been preoccupied with global order, reconciling failed states with prevailing norms of international order, largely by reinforcing and respecting state sovereignty through policies of recognition and non-intervention.

Reflecting on Canadian Policy

The prominent attention given to failed states by analysts and governments is recent, yet the conditions that define failed states have been prevalent in different states for a number of years. What is new is the realization that these states have an impact on the interests of governments and societies like Canada’s, and the idea that Western governments can and should intervene with policies that will alleviate or alter the conditions that are causing states to fail, providing them with greater resilience while reducing the threat that they pose to Canada. This review of the changes that have occurred in Ottawa’s approach toward failed states raises several issues worth further attention. The four phases reviewed here demonstrate the variability that exists in thinking about and responding to failed states. They also underline the importance of the factors that have influenced both the perceived need for a response and the form of that response.

The historical overview suggests that there has been a shift in Canadian policy over the past two decades. While some of the features of this policy have been around for decades, others are more recent or more pronounced. There is a tendency, for instance, to treat a failed state as an isolated condition independent of the global context in which these states must operate. There has been little effort to address the broader economic and political factors that affect fragile and failed states.

Moreover, there has been increased support for intervening with non-UN operations in a more selective manner. This reflects the traditional influence of alliance and institutional commitments on Canadian thinking. Alliances and institutions have brought attention to the issue of failed states and helped define and coordinate the Canadian response. Canadian policy in response to failed states has generally been articulated in and around these institutional and alliance commitments. This is not to argue that the Canadian government was always reacting to the practices of allies or following the directives of the UN or regional organizations. Rather, these commitments have had an influence on the timing and content of Canadian policy. Ottawa has also demonstrated a consistent effort to develop policy that is in line with its principal allies and institutional commitments. Its recent interest in reinforcing Canada's NATO connections, for instance, would account, at least to some degree, for the greater willingness to use military force as an instrument of intervention.

Finally, Ottawa has tended to look at failed states in relation to specific national interests. Many Canadian policymakers and analysts consider failed states a security threat demanding a more formidable response from government. The net effect has been to frame an interventionist policy that tends to focus primarily on security considerations and devotes less attention to the economic and political realm in which all states exist.

Reflecting on Canadian experiences with failed states, three key questions come to mind. First, why should Canada care or respond to failed states? For what reason should the condition of states on the other side of the planet be of any concern to Canadians? One possible reason might be humanitarian. Another might be economic, or another material interest. A third might be for security reasons. Should any one of these reasons be considered more important than another? How would giving priority to one of these reasons over the other two generate a different response, or a different set of states with which we would be concerned?

Alex Wilner takes issue with the emphasis that has been given to humanitarianism in influencing Canada's decision about where and when to intervene. Wilner challenges the views of Jim Wright, a former assistant deputy minister at DFATD, who argued in 2006 that if "we are not immediately threatened by the collapse or implosion of these states, our values as Canadians and our responsibilities as global citizens must invariably compel us to action in the face of the victimization, human suffering and misery that are the inevitable result."¹⁷ This sort of thinking, contends Wilner, is misplaced. "Canada's policy toward failed states must begin by looking after the security of Canadians, first and foremost," he insists, "followed only then by a responsibility to protect the globe's victimized citizens."¹⁸ It is problematic that the government is still unable to determine which failed state presents a threat requiring a response and to develop a response that addresses security interests first. Humanitarians for their part lament the inconsistencies and lack of response to many crises, arguing that security considerations or relations with principal allies have focused our attention only on some failed states rather than on the real needs of populations at risk. The proliferation of such states and populations at risk makes prioritizing Canadian resources and responses problematic.

A second set of questions relates to what can or should be done. Does Canada have anything to offer to failed states? Regardless of its motive—humanitarian, economic, or security—can Ottawa contribute anything worthwhile? If so, what, and how, and with whom? As Robert Jackson has argued, "there are many ways to responsibly address the problems of 'failed states' without suspending their sovereignty and patronizing their people."¹⁹ There exists a broad range of economic and political sanctions that can be used, including military force. There seems to be a general consensus that this is an area in which Canada should act only in concert with others. Canada's best option, argues Carleton University political scientist David Carment, "remains to work in unison and alongside our allies and other like-minded states in the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and other regional groupings. Not only does Canada lack the ability to undertake sustained unilateral intervention, but the nature of rehabilitating dangerous failed states is a long-term and costly affair that requires a coordinated and multilateral approach."²⁰

This is, no doubt, an accurate appraisal of the way things are, but it creates an additional set of problems that can make such interventions difficult for the failed state and for Canada's foreign relations. What happens when national policies and the practices of Canada's allies do not converge? In the past, for example, the Canadian and American approaches to training police officers in Haiti has differed.²¹ In Afghanistan, as well, there were suggestions that the American and Canadian approaches to Provincial Reconstruction Teams were different in important ways. Coordination may become both more important and more difficult as alliance partners operate with a different range of priorities and capabilities and with different sorts of domestic economic and political pressures.

Canadian governments have found it difficult to develop an effective response to failed states with an effective strategy encompassing different policy responses and agencies. This has led to variations on a "whole of government" approach in which different agencies are encouraged to coordinate their policy responses. The idea here is that failed states require not just the restoration of order but a wholesale transformation, including economic and technical assistance and political reform; hence, one needs to call upon experts from many branches of the public sector and the community at large. The premise makes good sense, but the execution is often difficult, as agency protocols and priorities do not always meld.

A third and final set of questions asks where and when should Canada act? Assuming there will always be competing opportunities for responding, how should the government decide to act? Perhaps this question is answered by the response to the first two questions. If one is more concerned about the effectiveness of Canada's response, Canada should respond where the most positive change can be effected. If one is more concerned about the first question—why should Canada care?—the government should respond to the greatest humanitarian need, or where Canada's economic and security interests are greatest. Carment and his colleagues have taken the view that relevance and effectiveness should be the primary considerations: "Canadian engagement will be most effective when the situation is highly relevant to Canadian foreign policy priorities, and when the potential Canadian contribution is likely to have a significant and positive impact."²²

The persistence of failed states since the 1950s and the intractable nature of their problems have generated another distinct school of observations

among Canadian analysts. Writing in the early 1990s, a prominent realist, Denis Stairs, began to voice concerns over the limitless commitments of a policy designed to rescue failing or failed states: “A more accurate conclusion might be that the conflicts themselves are deeply ingrained in cynically exploited combinations of unhappy history and intractable circumstance. Where such is the case, externally imposed solutions will often require massive interventions along a wide variety of the dimensions of modern government—and for periods lasting a generation or more—if they are to have even a modest chance of success.”²³ His skeptical view has been confirmed in numerous observations. For example, a parliamentary committee examining conditions in Haiti in 2006 reflected the complexity and multi-dimensional character of any effective response to state failure, as it noted the need to address insecurity, corruption, the justice system, policing, agriculture, education, inequality, poverty, unemployment, civil society, labour organizations, and private investment.²⁴ Stairs went on to write that “this raises a series of questions about the sources of legitimacy for such operations—operations which, in another time, might have been described as ‘imperialism’ and defended on precepts that we can no longer accept.”²⁵ In response, many interventionists underlined the need to be attentive to local agency whenever possible. For example, and again drawing from the Haiti discussion, witnesses maintained that initiatives “would have to respect Haiti’s sovereignty, fully reflect Haitian society’s needs and enhance Haitians’ capacity to sustain and embrace reforms.”²⁶ At the same time, they were equally quick to note the lack of local capacity to meet standards of democracy, policing, and justice.

Overlying the Canadian debate regarding intervention, there remained a persistent view that something can be done and that Canadians are capable of doing it. For example, in his report lamenting the lack of attention to the security implications of failed states, Wilner writes that the “wrinkle for Canadian decision makers is that, while they have developed the military, diplomatic, and reconstructive means with which to assist fragile and failed states, they continue to lack the mechanisms to decide, realistically and strategically, when to use them.”²⁷ The assumption here is that more intrusive forms of intervention, including the use of military force to assist failed states, could be an effective policy. Since the 1990s, policy officials in Canada have leaned heavily on intervention as a necessary or desirable response. There seems to be less interest in a broader

range of policy responses, including the kind of financial and technical assistance or trade and aid packages that were employed in the past, which stopped short of overt interference in the internal affairs of these states. There also remains little evidence to demonstrate that Canada has developed the means to assist in a manner that is consistently effective, as developments in both Afghanistan and Libya reveal. The issue thus remains not only “when” to intervene in whatever form, but “if” intervention can be conducted in a way that would actually make things better. In the early 1990s, Stairs himself concluded that “in spite of these unresolved dilemmas ... the optimistic view, rooted in the concept of peace through progress, is widely and deeply held, and it contributes mightily to the insistence that the government must take action in almost every case.”²⁸ Subsequent practice may reflect a more selective application of such actions, but there remains a view that intervention of the type Canada has deployed can remedy the problems of failed states.

Conclusion

Canadian policy has demonstrated ongoing support favouring international interventions to rescue failed states; yet, setting aside Afghanistan, in practice this has often meant selectively supporting a minimal degree of international intervention at little real cost over the long term. These interventions have also tended to ignore the broader economic and political contexts, both past and present, that have given rise to failed states. Canadian policy toward failed states over the past decade has marked an effort to reframe Canada’s security policy in a manner that challenges the pre-eminence of the principle of state sovereignty, emphasizes individual security, and creates a permissive environment for intervention. At the same time, it has supported the development of a normative order at the level of international society in support of such practices. The government’s approaches to interventions in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya provide a significant illustration of its commitment to use force to protect populations at risk in selected circumstances. This suggests a recasting of national security priorities. Specifically, it reflects a view that so-called failed states present a security threat to Canadian values and interests.

It appears to be one position on which both Liberals and Conservatives agree, having been reasserted by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2011:

That's the kind of thing I think we really have to worry about, where you have not just poverty, but poverty and literally lawlessness becomes the nature of the state. And I do think it's in our broader interests and the right thing to do to try and help people and help countries so that they don't get into that situation.... It's why we're so involved in Haiti. Not to have that kind of a state in our own backyard. I think those kinds of situations are very dangerous.²⁹

The debate over how to respond to the conflict in Syria in 2012 illustrated the dilemmas and limitations of Canadian policy toward failed states. It is obvious that in many areas Canada lacks the capacity and the political will to act alone in responding to failed states. It can, and has, adopted some unilateral measures, usually in the form of statements, withdrawing or disbursing assistance, or diplomatic and economic sanctions. While most of these are taken in coordination with the actions of other states and institutions, some can and have been taken alone. Overt forms of response, however, including more direct interventions, require the support and assistance of others, principally the United States, but ideally multilateral agencies like the United Nations or, as has become more common, NATO.

It is even tougher to assess Canadian interests. At one level, Syria presented a clear case of government oppression over its domestic population, putting the security of individual citizens at risk. It was doubtless a candidate for intervention on humanitarian grounds alone. Viewed in a different light, however, Syria is enmeshed in a war contested not only by domestic actors but also by outsiders from the region who have a keen interest in the outcome of the conflict and are intervening to shape it. Intervention in such a situation without close attention to the interests and actions of all of the parties involved is deeply problematic at best, as the experience in Afghanistan has clearly demonstrated.³⁰

In certain respects, this policy is vastly different from the modest foreign aid programs launched in response to the Communist threat of the 1950s. Ottawa has also adopted a more expansive view of the characteristics

of a failed state, embracing a variety of specific political and economic practices—the absence of elections or restrictions on free markets. In the past, such different approaches to government and the economy were accepted by the Canadian government and were not, in and of themselves, cause for concern, let alone an enticement for intervention. That more hands-off approach has changed. It has been replaced by a commitment to redefine the prerequisites for state sovereignty as implied in such notions as “responsibility to protect” and to intervene where possible to bring about necessary change. It would seem that the ultimate objective remains supporting the transformation of failed states so that they look and act just like western liberal democracies.

Notes

- 1 CBC News, “Canada recognizes Kosovo, Serbia pulls ambassador,” 18 March 2008, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/canada-recognizes-kosovo-serbia-pulls-ambassador-1.745469> (accessed 1 February 2012).
- 2 The term “failed state” will be used throughout this chapter, but will not be extensively defined or discussed here. It is important to note that this is a highly contested term. For a discussion of the definition of the concept and some of its conceptual and practical problems see David Carment and Y. Samy, “Engaging Fragile States: Closing the Gap between Theory and Policy,” *Global Dialogue* 13, no. 1 (2011): 1–11.
- 3 R. H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- 4 See, for example, Dorothy Jones, *Code of Peace: Ethics and Security in a World of Warlord States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of Civilization in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
- 5 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 1514 (XV), 14 December 1960.
- 6 Quoted in K. Van Brabant, “What is Peacebuilding? Statebuilding and Peacebuilding,” 2010, <http://www.interpeace.org/resource/what-is-peacebuilding-statebuilding-and-peacebuilding/> (accessed 14 November 2015).
- 7 Chris Roberts, “Canadian Foreign Policy & African State Formation: Responsibilities, Silences, Culpabilities,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Victoria, B.C., 2013.
- 8 Cited in Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State? External Aid in Canada’s Foreign Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 22.
- 9 Donald Barry, “Interest Groups and the Foreign Policy Process: the Case of Biafra,” in *Pressure Group Behaviour in Canadian Politics*, ed.

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- 10 Asa McKercher, “The Centre Cannot Hold: Canada, Colonialism and the ‘Afro-Asian Bloc’ at the United Nations, 1960–62,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 2 (2014): 336.
- 11 R. H. Jackson, “Morality, Democracy and Foreign Policy,” in *Canada Among Nations, 1995: Democracy and Foreign Policy*, ed. M. A. Cameron and M. A. Molot (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995), 34–51.
- 12 Canada, Department of National Defence, “1994 Defence White Paper” (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1994).
- 13 United States, Department of State, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” September 2002, accessed 12 January 2012, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>.
- 14 Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, “Canada’s International Policy Statement: A Role of Pride and Influence in the World” (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, April 2005).
- 15 Alex Wilner, “Making the World Safe for Canada: Canadian Security Policy in a World of Failed States” (Halifax: Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, 2008), 3.
- 16 Rob Huebert, “Failed and Failing States: The Core Threat to Canadian Security,” in *In the Canadian Interest? Assessing Canada’s International Policy Statement*, ed. Derek Burney (Calgary: CDFAI, 2006), 71.
- 17 Wilner, “Making the World Safe for Canada,” 10.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Robert H. Jackson, “Surrogate Sovereignty? Great Power Responsibility and ‘Failed States,’” Institute of International Relations, University of British Columbia, Working Paper No. 25, 1998, 13.
- 20 David Carment, “Effective Defence Policy for Responding to Failed and Failing States” (Calgary: CDFAI, 2005), 10.
- 21 See David Beer, “Peacebuilding on the Ground: Reforming the Judicial Sector in Haiti,” in *Building Sustainable Peace*, ed. Tom Keating and W. Andy Knight (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2004), 119–41.
- 22 David Carment, S. Prest, J. Gazo, T. Bell, and S. Houghton, *Assessing the Circumstances and Forms of Canada’s Involvement in Fragile States: Towards a Methodology of Relevance and Impact* (Ottawa: NPSIA, 2006), 7.
- 23 Denis Stairs, “Contemporary security issues,” in Canada, Parliament, Special Joint Committee on Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy, “Report of the Special Joint Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy,” November 1994, 10.
- 24 Canada, House of Commons, “Canada’s International Policy Put to the Test in Haiti,” Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, December 2006.
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- 26 Canada, House of Commons, "Canada's International Policy Put to the Test in Haiti."
- 27 Wilner, "Making the World Safe for Canada," v.
- 28 Stairs, "Contemporary security issues," 10.
- 29 CBC News, "Transcript of Peter Mansbridge's interview with PM Stephen Harper," 8 September 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/transcript-of-peter-mansbridge-s-interview-with-pm-stephen-harper-1.985393> (accessed 1 February 2012).
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