



NUMUN

Northwestern University Model United Nations

DISEC

Topic C: Failed States and International

Security

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Bafna 1

Failed States and International Security

Introduction:

When confronted with the term ‘failed state,’ many images come to mind of a nation that is overrun with chaos, with a government that can do nothing to control the people that it is supposed to govern and that the country is simply doomed to a dismal future of disarray and increasing entropy. However, a number of circumstances are considered before a nation is regarded as a ‘failed state.’ A more specific definition of a failed state, as provided by the Fund for Peace, is that a state has failed to fulfill some of the basic conditions and responsibilities of a government. These criteria are: the loss of physical control of its territory or of the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force therein, the erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, the inability to provide reasonable public services, and the inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community. A failed state also suffers from social, political and economic disarray.

According to this definition and these conditions, several states fall under this category of being a ‘failed state.’ While it may seem inconsequential that a state is deemed to be a failure, the consequences of being deemed so can be quite severe. It is in these areas that greater geopolitical issues of international security can spawn, and it is from these areas that problems such as terrorism and ethnic conflict can fester and spread to other parts of the world.

It is the hope of this committee that some solution can be found to properly address a ‘failed state’ and the effect it may have on international security, or determine what can be done to alleviate any adverse effects on international security. It is very important to know that this issue is very



sensitive as the labeling of a nation as a ‘failed state’ has its own consequences and can itself cause a vast array of potentially unforeseen international political issues.

Background:

Throughout history there have always been ‘failed states’ that fit under the modern definition. The Roman Empire during the Crisis of the Third Century faced severe military disorder, political chaos and corruption, and an extreme economic downturn. Additionally, the Plague of Cyprian, which broke out in the middle of the third century affected the empire such that there were widespread shortages of manpower in agriculture and the military.¹ All these conditions threatened to cause the demise of the Roman Empire and certainly caused it to crumble a great deal ultimately leading many to believe that the Roman state at this period in time arguably qualified as a ‘failed state.’

The Chinese Imperial period faced several episodes of ‘failed states’ as massive social unrest, economic instabilities and political decay revoked the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ for so many dynasties, from the Zhou dynasty to the Qing, the last Chinese Imperial dynasty. During these periods of economic, social, political and even military unrest, the government was no longer able to effectively control the territory it possessed in its jurisdiction. Furthermore, the imperial courts were not effective in maintaining or restoring order in any sense and as rebellions around the empire increased in force, they brought down one dynasty and replaced the old ‘failed’ dynasty with a new and promising one.

Thus the phenomenon of the failed state is by no means a new one, as they have existed since antiquity and have contributed to the demise of great empires and the rise of new political entities. Although failed states certainly indicate a dire situation in any given country, they also can



lead to new ages in a nation's history and can sometimes allow for progressive change for the better to occur in an otherwise stagnant state.

Having just witnessed the horrors of the Second World War a little more than a decade before, Randolph Compton in 1957 established the Fund for Peace as an initiative to prevent war and alleviate conditions around the world that cause war to break out. It was noted that much of war and other forms of conflict emerge due to weak governance primarily in 'failed states.' Since 2005, Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy* magazine work together to publish an annual list known as the 'Failed States Index.' This assesses states, which are determined by membership in the United Nations, and excludes such entities as Taiwan, Palestine, Kosovo and others.ⁱⁱ A system of 12 indicators was developed under the categories of Social Indicators, Economic Indicators and Political Indicators. Within these categories are criteria that are rated on a 0 to 10 scale, with 0 being the most stable and 10 being the least stable.

A country is deemed to be a failed state if it receives an aggregate score of 90 or more, a warning state if it receives a score of 60 or more, a moderate state if it gets a score of 30 or more and a sustainable if it gets 0 or more.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are four social indicators, two economic indicators and seven political indicators that are considered when evaluating a country's situation and resulting score and label. The four social indicators are: demographic pressures, massive movement of refugees and internally displaced persons, legacy of vengeance-seeking groups or grievances, and chronic and sustained human emigration.^{iv} The economic indicators are as follows: uneven economic development along group lines and sharp/severe economic decline.^v And the political indicators are: criminalization/delegitimization of the state (rampant corruption, etc.), progressive deterioration of public services, widespread violations of human rights, security apparatus as 'state within a state' (i.e.



guerilla armies or private armies), rise of factionalized elites, and the intervention of other states or external factors (which affect the internal balance of power or resolution of the conflict).^{vi}

So far, the United Nations has worked with other member nations to help alleviate many of these ‘failed states.’ It had worked with several other international organizations such as the IMF to help countries with severe economic crises and has deployed its military task force to those countries requiring neutral peacekeeping forces to prevent further conflict from emerging. Meanwhile, the UN has acquiesced to the imposition of sanctions and the application of political pressure on those countries with gross human rights violations and other politically intransigent countries, to influence the sometimes malfeasant behavior of governments with gross violations.



Current Status:

The geopolitical effects of labeling a country as a ‘failed state’ can be tremendous. For one, the nation might lash out at those nations and organizations who agree with this label, which is generally perceived to be negative. Furthermore, the application of this politically sensitive name can cause a nation that is otherwise supportive of an organization to become an opponent of the organization or nation applying such a label. Additionally, countries that have been labeled as ‘failed states’ have generally been regarded henceforth as rogue states, fragile or crisis states, or in some cases pariah states.

A common consequence of labeling a state as ‘failed’ can be that the nation loses confidence in international support and as such can be an impetus for it to support elements that operate contrary to global interests. It may give such a government an incentive not to better its situation through conventional means, but to embrace radical policies that may be detrimental to the countries around it.

Additionally, should any nation be regarded as a ‘failed state,’ this may give anti-governmental elements or anti-social elements in that nation the boost they need to campaign and operate against the current government and possibly remove it from power. While it may certainly mean radical changes within the nation, the policies adopted by the previously anti-governmental and/or anti-social elements can adversely affect its neighbors and allies, inviting regional instability. It also has the effect of creating a lessened confidence in the country’s economy, especially if the economy is already experiencing severe economic downturns. Ultimately, the greater negative effects of applying a label such as this also must be taken into account, as the consequences could prove far worse than the present situation in any given nation.



The major players in this controversial issue are mainly the United Nations and the major world powers, including the Big Five nations in the UN Security Council. Having a major world power apply the controversial label creates a great deal of resentment among other nations that have to deal with the added pressure of a negative label enforced by the international community at large. In addition to the country in question, the surrounding countries can be adversely affected by this enforced label and can alter policies in accordance to what the UN and other major powers deem a particular country to be. These policies can be negative, as in no longer supporting an existing government, ceasing to invest in a country's economy or ceasing to give aid to a nation in desperate need. This can lead to a massive emigration of peoples to neighboring areas and throughout the rest of the world. Possible effects of this emigration could mean anti-immigrant and racial policies that could strike civil unrest in surrounding areas, policies to limit immigration from a failed state, or even external intervention into government politics by other governments, or non-governmental organizations determined to influence the politics of a region.

The most recent list of the Failed States Index based on the aggregate FSI score, released by the Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy* magazine, assigns the failed state status to 38 countries. Going from the highest to lowest score in this category of 'failed states' is: Somalia with a score of 114.7, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Chad, DR Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Guinea, Pakistan, Ivory Coast, Haiti, Myanmar, Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, North Korea, Yemen, Bangladesh, East Timor, Uganda, Sri Lanka, Niger, Burundi, Nepal, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Lebanon, Republic of the Congo, Uzbekistan, Sierra Leone, Georgia, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Tajikistan and Iran with a score of 90. The remaining categories of warning states, moderate states and sustainable states can be found on the Fund for Peace website or the *Foreign Policy* magazine website.^{vii} For a more comprehensive and interactive map of states according to this index, please



visit:

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/2009_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings.

The financial crisis of 2008 also hit the poorest nations in the world, affecting many of the world's failed states. During the first half of that year, prices for commodities such as oil and other minerals increased greatly. Then in the third quarter, these same commodities experienced huge decreases in price. The effect was that the increase in price rendered many commodities unaffordable for certain nations. For example, Bangladesh could not afford to import as much oil as it needed, while later on, commodity exporting countries like Sudan could not make enough revenue and thus enforced a system of bribery and extortion, which favored those in power and adversely affected the poorest people. With the decline in economic growth, the risk of various types of conflict also increased.

Ultimately, it is the mission of this committee to go beyond the mere labeling of nations as failed, on the verge of failure, moderate or sustainable. While many 'failed states' experience political and economic instability, many continue to simply blame their present state on the political and biased pressures from outside countries and external intervention. Otherwise, they say that they have merely inherited a dire situation and can do little to get out of it, and thus can do nothing to stop the vicious cycle of corruption and intimidation in their nations. Mahamoud Adam Bechir, the ambassador of Chad to the United States exclaimed in regards to the situation there: "We have done everything right, played by the rules, and still we are considered like Sudan... This is very offensive. We are not like Sudan. The situation in Chad is a product of the conflict in Darfur."^{viii}

As long as states continue to be labeled as 'failed' or 'failing,' the blame-game will continue and so it should be the aim of the United Nations and this committee to maneuver through these



types of statements and facilitate policy implementations to alleviate the problems these nations face and the threat they pose to nations around them and to global security as a whole.

Bloc Positions:

There are four basic viewpoints to consider in this issue. The viewpoint of the sustainable countries, who seek to maintain their governmental sustainability and also wish to help alleviate the pressures affecting fragile and failed states. These states are few in number but do have some resources to aid the less stable nations. The next group of nations is the moderate nations, that generally share similar viewpoints with the sustainable group. While some sustainable groups are bordered by warning groups, most are surrounded by moderates. Moderates, however, generally border either warning groups or failed states and it is the moderates that seek to help warning group nations to lower their FSI score and become more stable as political and economic entities. The warning groups are generally the developing nations and may be just near the moderate level or just near the failed level. This group can be highly vulnerable to political, economic and social turmoil and generally seeks to increase its stability. Many of these warning group nations border failed states and so seek to prevent any instability from spilling over into their borders. The last group is the failed states, and while many nations in this group may not agree with the ranking they have been given, it is their general goal to improve their situation. These nations are generally developing and face a vast array of social, political and economic issues that affect the stability in their country and the surrounding regions.



Question to Consider:

- Is it appropriate to assign countries the status of 'failed state'?
- What are some ways to address the situation in these countries, aside from political and economic pressure, if any?
- Should the status quo be maintained?
- What are some broader effects, outside of social, political and economic ones, of the existence of failed states?
- Is it ethical to impose sanctions on a failed state?
- What happens if a failed state is also a rogue state and remains intransigent with respect to international attempts at aiding and guiding that country?

This list of questions is only meant to get you started on your research and should not be the only questions to consider in researching your country's position on the issue. It is only meant to help facilitate debate and resolution making. Delegates should think beyond these basic questions in order to properly represent their country's interests in DISEC.

Recommended Sources:

- www.un.org
- www.cnn.com
- www.bbc.com
- <http://fundforpeace.org>
- http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/the_2009_failed_states_index



Bibliography:

ⁱ Christine A. Smith. Plague in the Ancient World: A Study from Thucydides to Justinian. Loyola University New Orleans.

ⁱⁱ http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=102&Itemid=327. Retrieved 2007-08-25.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} www.fundforpeace.org

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Failed_State_Index.png

^{viii} http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/2009_failed_states_index_blame_game

