Review of International Studies (2011), 37, 951–972 *© 2010 British International Studies Association*
doi:10.1017/S0260210510000951 *First published online 26 Aug 2010*

The regional dimensions of state failure

STEFAN WOLFF*

Abstract. The academic and policy debate on state failure reaches back to the early 1990s. Since then, its empirical and analytical sophistication has grown, yet the fact that state failure is a regional phenomenon, that is, that it occurs in clusters of geographically contiguous states, has largely been overlooked. This article first considers the academic and policy debates on state failure in the Political Science/International Relations and Development Studies literatures, and offers a definition of state failure that is derived from the means of the state, rather than its ends. Subsequently engaging with existing scholarship on the concept of 'region' in international security, the article develops a definition of 'state failure regions'. Further empirical observation of such regions and additional conceptual reflections lead to establishing an analytical model for the study of state failure regions and allow indentifying a number of concrete gains in knowledge and understanding that can result from its application.

Stefan Wolff is Professor of International Security at the University of Birmingham. He specialises in the management of contemporary security challenges and has extensively written on ethnic conflict, international conflict management and statebuilding. Among his 14 books to date are *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective* (Oxford University Press 2006, 2nd ed. 2007), *Institutions for the Management of Ethnopolitical Conflict in Central and Eastern Europe* (Council of Europe 2008, with Marc Weller), *Ethnic Conflict: Causes – Consequences – Responses* (Polity 2009, with Karl Cordell), and *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective* (Palgrave 2010, with Richard Whitman). Wolff is the founding editor of the journal *Ethnopolitics* and an associate editor of *Civil Wars*. He is frequently advising governments and international organisations on conflict resolution issues, especially on questions of negotiation strategy and constitutional design. He holds an MPhil in Political Theory from Magdalene College, Cambridge, and a PhD in Political Science from the London School of Economics.

Introduction

The academic debate on state failure reaches back to the early 1990s. It was, initially, a by-product of the political fall-out of the end of the Cold War. As the level of empirical and analytical sophistication in this debate has grown, so, too, has the number of states considered close to, or beyond, the point of failure. Yet, what this literature so far has failed to appreciate in full is that state failure is a regional phenomenon. That is, it predominantly occurs in clusters of geographically contiguous states that experience various degrees of failure. Understanding

* Thanks for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article and parts thereof are extended to Fiona Adamson, Karl Cordell, Rick Fawn, Annemarie Peen Rodt, Richard Whitman and three anonymous referees. The usual disclaimer applies.

state failure, thus, means to understand analytically what it means to speak of state failure and of a region in this context, that is, to marry discourses on state failure[1] with those on regions[2] and on that basis arrive at a definition of 'state failure

[1] The state failure discourse has been carried among others by R. H. Bates, *Political Insecurity and State Failure in Contemporary Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Development at Harvard University, 2005); P. Bilgin and A. Morton, 'From "Rogue" to "Failed" States: The Fallacy of Short-termism', *Politics*, 24:3 (2004), pp. 169–80; T. Debiel, *Fragile Peace: State Failure, Violence and Development in Crisis Regions* (London: ZED Books, 2002), R. H. Dorff, 'Democratisation and Failed States: The Challenge of Ungovernability', *Parameters*, 26:2 (1996), pp. 17–31; R. H. Dorff, 'Responding to the Failed State: The Need for Strategy', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 10 (Winter 1999), pp. 62–81; R. H. Dorff, 'Responding to the Failed State: Strategic Triage', in A. J. Jones and M. Manwaring (eds), *Beyond Declaring Victory and Coming Home* (Westport, CT: Praeger), pp. 225–43; R. H. Dorff, 'Failed States after 9/11: What Did We know and What Have We Learned?', *International Studies Perspectives*, 6:1 (2005), pp. 20–34; D. C. Esty et al. 'The State Failure Project: Early Warning Research for US Foreign Policy Planning', in J. L. Davies and T. R. Gurr(eds), *Preventive Measures: Building Risk Assessment and Crisis Early Warning Systems* (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), pp. 27–38; G. B. Helman, G. B. and S. R. Ratner, 'Saving Failed States', *Foreign Policy*, 89 (Winter 1992–3), pp. 3–20; J. Herbst, 'Responding to State Failure in Africa', *International Security*, 21:3 (1996–7), pp. 120–44; 'High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change', *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* (New York: UN, 2004); F. Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile Books, 2004); A. A. Mazrui, 'The Failed State and Political Collapse in Africa', in O. A. Otunnu and M. W. Doyle (eds), *Peacemaking and Peacekeeping for the New Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), pp. 233–43; J. Milliken (ed.), *State Failure, Collapse and Reconstruction*. London: Blackwell, 2003); R. I. Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2003); R. I. Rotberg (ed.), *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); U. Schneckener, 'States at Risk: Zur Analyse fragiler Staatlichkeit', in U. Schneckener (ed.), *States at Risk: Fragile Staaten als Sicherheits-und Entwicklungsproblem* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2004), pp. 5–27; State Failure Task Force, *Phase II Findings* {http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/pitfdata.htm} accessed on 3 August 2009; State Failure Task Force, *Phase III Findings* {http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/pitfdata.htm} accessed on 3 August 2009; State Failure Task Force, *Phase IV Findings* {http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/pitfdata.htm} accessed on 3 August 2009.

[2] 'Region' as a concept has been explored of late by E. Adler and M. Barnett, *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); M. Ayoob, 'From Regional System to Regional Society: Exploring Key Variables in the Construction of Regional Order', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 53 (1999), pp. 247–60; B. Buzan, C. Jones and R. Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism in Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); B. Buzan and O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); B. O. Buzan, Wæver and J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998); T. Dertwinkel, 'Geographical Contexts and Neighbourhood Effects in Civil War: Why Regional Dummies Won't Do the Trick', paper prepared for the research seminar on 'Political Order and Regional Conflict' (ETH Zurich, 2006); P. F. Diehl and J. Lepgold (eds), *Regional Conflict Management* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); S. Duke, 'Regional Organisations and Conflict Prevention: CFSP and ESDI in Europe', in D. Carment and A. Schnabel (eds), *Conflict Prevention: Path to Peace or Grand Illusion?* (Tokyo: UN University Press 2003), pp. 91–111; L. Fawcett, 'The Evolving Architecture of Regionalisation', in M. Pugh and W. P. Singh Sidhu (eds), *The UN and Regional Security: Europe and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), pp. 11–30; D. A. Lake and P. M. Morgan, *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), D. Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), S. N. MacFarlane, 'Regional Peacekeeping in the CIS', in R. Thakur and A. Schnabel (eds), *UN Peacekeeping Operations: Ad Hoc Missions, Permanent Engagement* (Tokyo: UN University Press, 2001), pp. 77–99; S. Patrick, *Weak States and Global Threats: Assessing Evidence of 'Spillovers'* (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2006); M. Pugh and N. Cooper, *War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004); J. Roper, 'The Contribution of Regional Organisations in Europe', in O. A. Otunnu and M. W. Doyle (eds), *Peacemaking and Peacekeeping for the New Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), pp. 255–71; B. Rubin, 'Regional Approaches to Conflict Management in Africa', {http://www.un.int/colombia/english/consejo_seguridad/IPA-RegAproAfricaBarnett%20R_%20RubinAug08–01.htm} accessed on 4 August 2009;N. Slocum and T. Felicio, 'The Role of Regional Integration in the

regions'. Empirical observation of such regions can then lead to establishing an analytical model for their study – both as dependent variable (that is, for the study of the causes of state failure) and as independent variable (that is, for the study of the consequences of state failure).

While the study of international security has seen a remarkable increase in engagement with these two concepts – state failure and regions – both literatures have remained largely unconnected.[3] State failure is primarily analysed at the level of the (nation-) state and is concerned with a search for its causes, while analyses of regional and, by extension, international security consider state failure only as one among many factors, albeit an increasingly important one because of its consequences. A third discourse, prevalent among scholars and practitioners of development, uses a somewhat different terminology (for example, fragile states, low-income countries under stress) to engage with the phenomenon of state failure and has paid more attention to its regional dimensions, but has only recently considered questions of security in greater detail.

Against this background, my aim is to begin to fuse these debates in a more systematic way and thereby to develop an analytical model on the basis of which we can gain a better understanding of state failure (in terms of both causes and consequences). The first section begins with a brief account of the debates on state failure, identifying commonalities in existing approaches to state failure before offering my own definition of the phenomenon. In section two, I engage with the relevant literature on 'region' as an analytical category and then offer a definition of 'state failure region'. Section three proposes an analytical model for the study of state failure as a regional phenomenon. The last section concludes by summarising the main anticipated gains in knowledge and understanding if this approach were to be applied systematically and comparatively to the study of state failure.

1. Approaches to state failure

1.1 The state failure debate in Political Science and International Relations/ International Security

Incidents of state failure in the first half of the 1990s were predominantly analysed through the prism of the security dilemma as applied to the domestic arena.

Promotion of Peace and Security', *UNU-CRIS Occasional Papers 2006/2* (Tokyo: UN University, 2006); J. Sperling and E. Kirchner, *Recasting the European Order: Security Architectures and Economic Cooperation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); R. Väyrynen, 'Regionalism: Old and New', *International Studies Review*, 5:1 (2003), pp. 25–52; O. Wesley-Smith, 'Reinventing Government: The Politics of State Failure and Regional Intervention in the Pacific', paper prepared for presentation at the Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in the Pacific Islands (Apia, Samoa, 2004).

[3] For notable but rare exceptions, see H. Buhaug and K. S. Gleditsch, 'Contagion or Confusion? Why Conflicts Cluster in Space', *International Studies Quarterly*, 52:2 (2008), pp. 215–233; S. Chesterman, M. Ignatieff, and R. Thakur (eds), *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance* (Tokyo: UN University Press, 2005); D. Lambach, 'Close Encounters in the Third Dimension: The Regional Effects of State Failure', in D. Lambach and T. Debiel (eds), *State Failure Revisited: The Globalization of Security and Neighbourhood Effects* (Duisburg-Essen: Institute for Development and Peace, 2007), pp. 32–52; and J. A. Piazza, 'Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?', *International Studies Quarterly*, 52:3 (2008), pp. 469–88.

Emerging anarchy in disintegrating multinational states in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the newly independent states that emerged from them and most other countries of the region suddenly freed from the controls imposed on them by Soviet dominance of the communist bloc was seen as the main cause behind a range of ethnic conflicts.[4] Regardless of the merits of the explanatory value of the security dilemma to such events, it soon became clear that the causal chain anarchy (that is, state failure) → security dilemma → ethnic conflict was at best an oversimplification of more complex processes, at worst it had turned the sequence and nature of events upside down. Other authors recognised that state failure and ethnic violence were more often simultaneous rather than sequential phenomena.[5] Today, the predominant discourse is that state failure is accompanied, and caused, by ethnic and other forms of civil conflict, albeit not by them alone.[6]

This debate reflected to a considerable extent policy concerns. Weak, failing, failed and collapsed states – the most common adjectives used in this context – were considered as sources of insecurity and instability beyond their own boundaries. Yet, while there was a policy and academic debate about state failure, the issue as a whole was primarily not seen in terms of posing a risk to international security, but merely as an 'unfortunate' phenomenon of either temporary significance (Central and Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union) or of a more endemic yet not particularly threatening nature (especially Africa). This is not to say that some scholars did not recognise the implicit long-term dangers to international security posed by state failure, but they remained at the margins of the debate at the time of their writing.[7]

A dramatic change in the state failure debate occurred only after September 11. State failure was now seen as a major enabler of international terrorist networks and therefore became a key focus of both scholarly analysis[8] and policy development.[9] No longer were state failure and its consequences simply viewed through the prism of humanitarian emergencies and occasionally of threats to regional security and stability, but state failure had become an issue of utmost

[4] Cf. for example, B. Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict', *Survival*, 35:1 (1993), pp. 27–47; J. Snyder and R. Jervis, Snyder, 'Civil War and the Security Dilemma', in B. Walter and J. Snyder (eds), *Civil Wars, Insecurity and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 15–37; and B. Walter, 'Introduction', in B. Walter and J. Snyder (eds), 'Civil Wars', pp. 1–12.

[5] Cf. for example, D. A. Lake and D. Rothchild, 'Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict', *International Security*, 21:2 (1996), pp. 41–75.

[6] S. Patrick, '"Failed" States and Global Security: Empirical Questions and Policy Dilemmas', *International Studies Review*, 9:4 (2007), pp. 644–62; Rotberg, 'State Failure'; State Failure Taskforce, 'Phase III Findings'; cf. also Buhaug and Gleditsch; 'Contagion'; Z. Iqbal and H. Starr, 'Bad Neighbors: Failed States and Their Consequences', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 25:4 (2008), pp. 315–31.

[7] On the genesis of the state failure debate, see Dorff, 'Failed States after 9/11', Patrick, 'Weak States', pp. 2–7, and Wesley-Smith, 'Reinventing Government', pp. 4–6.

[8] Milliken, 'State Failure'; Rotberg, 'State Failure'; Rotberg, 'When States Fail'.

[9] *The National Security Strategy of the US* (September 2002), {http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/index.html} accessed on 4 August 2009; *The National Security Strategy of the US*(March 2006), {http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/} accessed on 4 August 2009; *A Secure Europe in a Better World* (December 2003), {http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf} accessed on 4 August 2009; Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, *Investing in Prevention* (London: HMSO, 2005); High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 'A More Secure World'.

importance for international security. In the light of September 11, the implications of state failure have often been reduced to it being conducive to the spread of international terrorism. Increasingly, however, analysis of failed states has become more sophisticated, considering their relationship with international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organised crime, and environmental and public health threats in a more subtle and differentiated manner.[10]

The proliferation of studies of state failure has led to a wide range of different conceptualisations and definitions of the phenomenon. If one looks more closely at the conceptual elements in the body of Political Science/International Relations literature on state failure,[11] a first issue that emerges is the relative consensus that state failure is a gradual process and that states engulfed in it fall into four broad categories: weak, failing, failed and collapsed states. For all these different stages in the process of state failure, more or less elaborate indicators are developed. Rotberg describes failed states as 'tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous and contested bitterly by warring factions' and in most of which 'government troops battle armed revolts led by one or more rivals' whose roots lie in 'ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal enmity'.[12] A collapsed state, in Rotberg's view, 'is a rare and extreme version of a failed state' which 'exhibits a vacuum of authority'.[13] State failure thus being a process comprising a continuum of various stages of weakness (weak, failing, failed, collapsed states) is judged on the basis of performance criteria of the state, that is, its ability to provide public goods across its territory and to its population. This is above all related to security and the rule of law, but also extends to health care, education, transport and communication infrastructure, a regulated financial and economic system, etc.[14] Distinguishing between territorial control and service provision, Jenne additionally introduces the notion of a fragmented state in which state failure is limited to certain contested stretches of territory which the central government does not control (that is, where it cannot enforce its monopoly on violence) and to which it does not extend its provision of public goods, or does so in a limited fashion only.[15]

[10] L. Mincheva and T. R. Gurr, *Paper presented at the 48th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association* (Chicago, 2007), {http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p178915_index.html} accessed on 4 August 2009; J. A. Nicholson, *The Potentiality for State Failure via Organized Crime* (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2003); Patrick, 'Failed States'; Patrick, 'Weak States'.

[11] I am focussing here primarily on what one might call 'traditional' approaches to state failure in the Political Science/International Relations literature. There is, however, also a growing body of critical security studies literature that argues that 'representations of "state failure" as *the* threat against international security constitutes not so much a diagnosis of "threat" but a technique of governance on the part of some actors that seek to sustain the workings of neoliberal economic order.' (P. Bilgin and A. Morton, 'Rethinking State Failure: The Political Economy of Security', in D. Lambach and T. Debiel (eds), 'State Failure Revisited', pp. 7–31, here p. 12).

[12] R. I. Rotberg, The Failure and Collapse of Nation States: Breakdown, Prevention and Repair', in R. I. Rotberg, (ed.), 'When States Fail', pp. 1–50, here p. 5.

[13] Ibid., p. 9. Buzan and Wæver implicitly merge the two categories of failure and collapse, noting that 'state failure [. . .] is the collapse of empirical sovereignty'. (B. Buzan and O. Wæver, 'Regions and Powers', p. 22). Reno notes the category of the shadow state, describing it as 'the product of personal rule, usually constructed behind the façade of de jure sovereignty'. (W. Reno, 'Shadow States and the Political Economy of Civil Wars', in M. Berdal and D. M. Malone (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 43–68, here p. 45).

[14] Rotberg, 'The Failure', p. 3.

[15] E. K. Jenne, 'Sri Lanka: A Fragmented State', in R. I Rotberg (ed.), 'State Failure', pp. 219–44.

Using three criteria to measure state performance (security, welfare and legitimacy), Schneckener distinguishes consolidated/consolidating states from weak, failing and failed/collapsed ones, using security as the key indicator. He then elaborates on three sets of factors facilitating state failure: structural factors/root causes, aggravating/accelerating factors, and triggers. These can be found at three levels: international/regional (that is, external to the state concerned), state and sub-state.[16] Central for the analysis of state failure, according to Schneckener, are aggravating factors at the state level, hypothesising that elite behaviour is a key factor in the erosion or consolidation of state capacity.[17]

Milliken and Krause distinguish between state failure as a functional dimension of stateness and state collapse as its institutional dimension.[18] Full-blown state collapse, in their view, involves 'the extreme disintegration of public authority and the metamorphosis of societies into a battlefield of all against all'.[19] State failure is defined, similar to Schneckener, as failure 'to provide security and public order, legitimate representation, and wealth or welfare'.

The State Failure Task Force, created in 1995, considered state failure as 'a type of serious political crisis exemplified by events that occurred in the 1990s in Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liberia, and Afghanistan.'[20] Rejecting a narrow definition of state failure as 'instances in which central state authority collapses for several years [. . . of which] [f]ewer than 20 [. . .] episodes occurred globally between 1955 and 1998', a broader definition was adopted 'to include a wider range of civil conflicts, political crises, and massive human-rights violations that are typically associated with state breakdown.'[21] This led the members of the taskforce to define state failure as one of four categories of events: revolutionary wars,[22] ethnic wars,[23] adverse regime changes,[24] and genocides and politicides.[25] On this basis, the Task Force authors identified 135 consolidated cases of state failure between 1955 and

[16] Schneckener, 'States at Risk'.
[17] Schneckener, 'States at Risk', p. 20.
[18] J. Milliken and K. Krause, 'State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies', in J. Milliken, 'State Failure', pp. 1–21.
[19] Milliken and Krause, 'State Failure', p. 2.
[20] State Failure Task Force, 'Phase III Findings', p. 4.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Defined as '[e]pisodes of sustained violent conflict between governments and politically organized challengers that seek to overthrow the central government, replace its leaders, or seize power in one region. Most revolutionary wars are fought by guerrilla armies organized by clandestine political movements'. Examples cited include Colombia since 1984, Algeria since 1991, and Tajikistan from 1992 to 1998 (State Failure Task Force, 'Phase III Findings', p. 4).
[23] Defined as '[e]pisodes of sustained violent conflict in which national, ethnic, religious, or other communal minorities challenge governments to seek major changes in status'. Examples cited include Muslims in the Philippines since 1972 (Mindanao), Tamils in Sri Lanka since 1983, and Chechens in Russia since 1994 (State Failure Task Force, 'Phase III Findings', p. 4).
[24] Defined as '[m]ajor, abrupt shifts in patterns of governance, including state collapse, periods of severe elite or regime instability, and shifts away from democratic toward authoritarian rule'. The authors of the report also note in this context that 'some adverse regime changes are preceded by revolutionary or ethnic wars, as in Cuba in 1959 or Liberia in 1990. Some precipitate large-scale violence that may be followed by massive human rights violations. Adverse regime changes are analytically distinct from internal wars, however, and sometimes occur with minimal open violence. Peaceful changes from authoritarian rule to democratic governance are not considered state failures and thus are not included in this category'. (State Failure Task Force, 'Phase III Findings', p. 4)
[25] Defined as '[s]ustained policies by states or their agents, or, in civil wars, by either of the contending authorities that result in the deaths of a substantial portion of a communal or political group. In genocides, the victimized groups are defined primarily by their communal (that is, ethnolinguistic or religious) characteristics'. Examples cited include Rwanda in 1994 and Sudan (North-South Conflict,

1998. Among these, adverse regime transitions were the most frequent type of state failure, followed by ethnic wars, revolutionary wars, and ethnocides or politicides. The model developed by the members of the task force centres on three variables found crucial in *predicting* state failure: openness to international trade (a measure of international political and economic integration), infant mortality (indicative of living standards), and democracy. Though empirically capturing key aspects of the phenomenon of state failure, the logic of equating state failure with specific events is potentially flawed in that it assumes *a priori* that states fail in the presence of any of these events. However, there is evidence to the contrary in the sense that in any of these events the fully functioning state might be an essential participant: the genocides in Nazi Germany, Rwanda and Cambodia were committed by the state, the revolutionary wars in El Salvador and Colombia had the state as one of the conflict parties, and ethnic wars in places as diverse as Russia (Chechnya), Sri Lanka (Tamils), and Sudan (North-South), too, were not inter-group but group-state conflicts. While some of these cases can be salvaged by recourse to Jenne's notion of the fragmented state, others can not and do not qualify as failed states in the sense of a collapse of central state authority.

These and other accounts of the phenomenon also usually include categorisations of states according to their 'location' on the state failure continuum. These are snapshots of a particular moment in time and as such often static descriptions of a dynamic process of development that states undergo between weakness and collapse, and back.

1.2 The development discourse on fragile states

Scholars and practitioners of development have been confronted with issues related to state weakness, failure and collapse for a long period of time and have engaged these issues primarily through the lens of development, or more precisely a lack thereof.[26] This is reflected in the terminology used and the definitional concepts adopted. Increasingly, however, policy prescriptions of development scholars and practitioners resemble those made in the context of Political Science and International Relations approaches to state failure and regional/international security more closely.

The development policy discourse, as exemplified in papers by overseas development agencies, the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), etc., seems to have converged on the term 'fragile states'[27] to describe a range of phenomena associated with state weakness and failure, including state collapse, loss of territorial control, low administrative

but post-report events in Darfur would also qualify under this definition) (State Failure Task Force, 'Phase III Findings', pp. 4–5).

[26] The prevailing wisdom in the development community remains that poverty and conflict/security are inexorably linked to one another (for example, R. Picciotta et al, *Striking a New Balance: Donor Policy Coherence and Development Cooperation in Difficult Environments* (London: The International Policy Institute at Kings College London and The Global Policy Project, 2005), pp. 17–8).

[27] Note, however, that Schneckener uses the term 'fragile statehood' (*fragile Staatlichkeit*) in his Political Science/International Relations analysis of the phenomenon (Schneckener, 'States at Risk').

capacity, political instability, neo-patrimonial politics, conflict, and repressive polities.[28]

According to a working definition adopted by the UK's Department for International Development, fragile states are 'those where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor. The most important functions of the state for poverty reduction are territorial control, safety and security, capacity to manage public resources, delivery of basic services, and the ability to protect and support the ways in which the poorest people sustain themselves.'[29] The definition also explicitly notes that fragility is not limited to states affected by conflict (as implied by the State Failure Taskforce). Importantly from a policy perspective, features of fragile states are attributed both to capacity and willingness[30] of the state to overcome fragility. Using World Bank Country Policies and Institutional Performance Assessment (CPIA) ratings, generated a proxy list of 46 fragile states which appeared at least once in the fourth and fifth quintiles between 1999 and 2003.[31]

CPIA ratings also form the basis of the World Bank's own list of low-income countries under stress. These are defined as 'fragile states characterized by a debilitating combination of weak governance, policies and institutions'. According to the World Bank there are around thirty such countries, three-quarters of them affected by on-going armed conflicts, but there is no precise list of these countries, apart from 12 that have so far been selected for World Bank projects.[32]

The crucial trend in most of these definitions seems to be that, more than ever before, scholars and practitioners of development have established a clear link between development and security, the latter primarily in the sense of elementary physical security for people and property. Thus, Chauvet, Collier, and Hoeffler identify 'two distinct senses' in which states can fail: through not 'maintaining a monopoly of organised violence' and through providing 'a quality of regulation [of private economic activity] and of public goods [for example, transport infrastructure, health, and education] which is markedly worse than that provided by other governments.'[33] Similarly, Picciotta *et al*. define a fragile state as one that 'cannot

[28] M. Moreno Torres and M. Anderson, *Fragile States: Defining Difficult Environments for Poverty Reduction* (London: Department for International Development, 2004). This article also contains a very useful and referenced overview of various existing definitions, clustered according to three main approaches that the development community seems to take towards the phenomenon: 'fragile, failed, or crisis states' with a focus on state capacity related to sovereignty and conflict; 'poor performing countries' concerned with development outcomes and factors such as the quality of governance and policy choices; and 'difficult aid partners' addressing issues of donor-recipient relations in situations in which there is either a lack of will or capacity on the part of the recipient.

[29] Department for International Development, *Why we need to work more effectively in fragile states* (London: Department for International Development, 2005), pp. 7–8.

[30] Assessments of state willingness include both a judgement of how explicitly states *commit* politically to poverty reduction (including the existence of a 'clear strategy and the means and incentives to implement it') and of how *inclusive* this commitment is implemented, that is, the degree to which all sections of the population benefit from it (Moreno Torres and Anderson, 'Fragile States', p. 17).

[31] Department for International Development, 'Why we need to work', p. 27–8.

[32] World Bank, *World Bank Group Work in Low-income Countries under Stress: A Task Force Report*, {http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLICUS/Resources/388758–1094226297907/Task_Force_Report.pdf} accessed on 4 August 2009. The twelve countries are: Angola, Central African Republic, Comoros, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Togo, and Zimbabwe.

[33] Chauvet, Collier and Hoeffler, 'Paradise Lost', p. 1.

manage the combined demands of security and development', and conclude that 'a judicious balance should be struck among the global, regional and local dimensions of the new security and development challenge.'[34]

This recognition of the importance of a multi-level approach to the problem of state fragility is reflected widely by authors who consider dimensions and implications of state fragility beyond the boundaries of the state concerned.[35] Moreno Torres and Anderson, for example, state that in relation to West Africa '[n]o attempt to understand or address state weakness in the region can ignore the cross-border dimensions.'[36] Since the geographical scope of state weakness is not always coterminous with national borders, it makes sense to consider the *regional* or *supra-state* aspects of the conflict' (emphasis in original) and add that this also applies to the South Caucasus, the Horn of Africa and the African Great Lakes region. The global impact of fragile states is thus obvious in a number of different aspects: inter-state wars, refugee flows across borders, conventional weapons proliferation, exacerbation of regional conflicts, global security threats in relation to international terrorism (safe havens, limited capacity to cooperate in international law enforcement efforts), trade in WMD materials, international organised crime, energy security, and a weakening of international control and regulation systems (environmental protection, spread of diseases).[37] Similarly, Picciotto *et al.* refer to so-called 'problems without passports': conflict spill-overs, transnational organised crime, trafficking in guns, drugs and humans, infectious diseases and environmental threats.[38] A study of the strategic frameworks for peacebuilding in the four so-called Utstein countries[39] points out that '[e]xperiences in, for example, the western Balkans, West Africa, and the Great Lakes region show that the regional context of conflict is often fundamental to the prospects for peacebuilding', but also noted that there was a general strategic deficit in project implementation in this respect.[40]

While the development discourse is thus increasingly characterised by a number of shared assumptions about the importance of linking security, development and a broader regional vision in accounts of state fragility, and policy recommendations on how to deal with it, one of its significant shortcomings is a lack of a commonly agreed and universally applied definition of what constitutes a fragile state.[41] As a consequence, there is no joint list of fragile states among even major donor agencies.

[34] Picciotta et al., 'Striking a New Balance', p. 29.
[35] While the development literature generally is more attentive to such regional dimensions, there remains a significant subset of the literature that does not pay much attention to the regional context of state fragility. For example, a paper on good governance in post-conflict societies by the German development agency GTZ, commissioned by the federal development ministry, considers the diaspora as the only relevant external player (GTZ, 'Promoting Good Governance in Post-Conflict Societies' [Eschborn: GTZ, 2004], p. 7). Hopp and Kloke-Lesch do not consider regional aspects at all: U. Hopp and A. Kloke-Lesch, 'External Nation-building vs. Endogenous Nation-forming – A Development Policy Perspective', in J. Hippler (ed.), *Nation-building: A Key Concept for Peaceful Conflict Transformation?* (London: Pluto), pp. 137–50.
[36] Moreno Torres and Anderson, 'Fragile States', p. 9.
[37] Ibid., p. 8.
[38] Picciotta et al., 'Striking a New Balance', p. 12.
[39] Initially Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK, later joined by Sweden and Canada.
[40] D. Smith, *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together* (Oslo: Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004), p. 57.
[41] As noted above, this is also a problem in the Political Science/International Relations discourse.

1.3 A consensus definition?

What unites most of the different definitions of state failure above is that they focus on the state failing to function in terms of its *ends*. That is, the underlying assumption is that the state does not provide certain expected outputs and therefore fails, to a smaller or larger extent in one or more dimensions of its supposed output. This, however, ignores that in order to deliver on particular *ends*, the state requires specific *means*. The failure to secure these means is thus the more fundamental failure and precedes output failures. The question thus arises about what the state's specific means are for securing its ends, and here it is useful to refer to Max Weber's definition of the state. In his 1918 Munich lecture *Politics as Vocation*, Weber (my emphasis and translation) notes that

> Sociologically, [. . .] the state cannot be defined in terms of its ends. There is scarcely any task that some political association has not taken in hand, and there is no task that one could say has always been exclusive and peculiar to those associations, which are designated as political ones: today the state, or historically, those associations which have been the predecessors of the modern state. Ultimately, one can define the modern state sociologically only in terms of the specific means peculiar to it, [. . .] namely, the use of physical force. [. . .] *a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory*.[42]

Using this definition has several implications for the analysis of state failure. It proceeds from a *definition of the state* that is foundational for modern social science and focuses on minimal criteria of stateness/statehood. Failed states are thus those which do not exhibit these minimal criteria, that is, states that cannot successfully claim a monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory and over a given population. Legitimacy, in the way that Weber uses the term, is relatively value-free, simply meaning that citizens accept that the state is the only source for the use of violence, regardless of their reasons to do so (essentially beliefs in tradition, charisma, or legality based on fear of retribution and hope for rewards). Weber also emphasises the express link between state as a human community and territory: for a state to claim territory as its own, it must be able to enforce the monopoly on the use of force within it.

Hence, I consider state failure synonymous with a lack of empirical sovereignty in all or parts of a territory for which a state claims (often successfully) juridical sovereignty.[43] In other words, defining state failure *qua* non-performance of certain functions (security, welfare, regulation, public goods, etc.) is not sufficient because it describes particular situations that can but need not result from a lack of empirical sovereignty. The failure of states to perform certain functions can be, but need not be, a symptom of state failure. In the same way in which states need not have failed for genocide to occur, their lack of will or capacity to extend welfare services is not necessarily related to the degree of empirical sovereignty they have across all or parts of the territory they claim.

[42] M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), pp. 821–2. This is also referred to in international law as the 'three-elements doctrine' for the recognition of states (state power + state territory + state people), originally developed in G. Jellinek, *Allgemeine Staatslehre* (Berlin: Häring, 1914), pp. 394–434.

[43] For a comprehensive discussion of empirical and juridical sovereignty, see R. H. Jackson and C. G. Rosberg, 'Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood', *World Politics*, 35:1 (1982), pp 1–24.

Focusing on the failure of the state to secure a monopoly on the legitimate use of force does, however, allow conceptualising state failure as a continuum in the sense that most of the literature surveyed above does. The failure of states in this sense can be gradual in the way that the state loses its monopoly of violence in a spatial sense (that is, it is increasingly less able to exercise empirical sovereignty across the entire area for which it claims juridical sovereignty). This is the case with fragmented states. The other way in which we can observe a continuum is the degree to which the state is able to maintain its monopoly of force either permanently (for example, 'after dark') or to which it chooses to claim its monopoly against some, but not all its potential challengers (for example, surrendering to organised crime, but fighting secessionists or ideological insurgents).

This distinction between means and ends in the definition of state failure is important analytically: it means that state failure is a function of the contest for power and occurs where the state incumbents are challenged by rivals to such an extent that for parts or all of a state's territory the holders of empirical sovereignty cannot be determined or are not synonymous with those that claim juridical sovereignty (including situations in which no-one claims juridical sovereignty). Before building on this definition of state failure in Section 2, the next part of this article will briefly examine the way in which the concept of 'regions' has been used in security studies.

2. The concept of state failure regions

2.1 The discourse on regions in International Security

Weber's definition of the state, on which this examination of state failure builds, emphasises that 'territory is part of the definition.'[44] This is important in two ways. It provides a link with one element in the discourse on regions (that is, their territorial extent) and it connects with the concept of the fragmented state,[45] and thus allows distinguishing between stateness in an empirical and juridical sense. As I will demonstrate in this section of the article, there is thus also a link between state fragmentation and state failure region: states may become part of a larger state failure region because of their inability to enforce their empirical sovereignty across the entire territory over which they hold juridical sovereignty. In other words, functional links between sub-state territories in different states are instrumental for understanding the territorial extent of state failure regions.

Traditionally, regions have not figured prominently in international security studies, and if they did, rather unwieldy regions of the dimensions of continents or the Euro-Atlantic area were defined.[46] This has changed over the past decade-and-a-half or so, and regions have become a more prominent analytical category. Apart

[44] Weber, 'Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft', p. 822.
[45] Jenne, 'Sri Lanka' and T. Dertwinkel and D. Lambach, 'Breaking Down Breakdown: Localizing State Failure Using GIS', *Paper presented at the 48th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association* (Chicago, 2007), {http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p179782_index.html} accessed on 4 August 2009.
[46] For a detailed assessment of this shortcoming see Lemke, 'Regions', pp. 67 ff.

from studies in the field of international political economy, scholars have focussed on regions in different ways, including conceptual clarifications of the concept,[47] theories of regional security,[48] regional collective security arrangements,[49] and regional peacekeeping and conflict management.[50] Partly overlapping with these three areas of security studies in which regions have made a comeback are studies that, rather than primarily focussing on state actors and international organisations, extend their analyses to non-state actors, including ethnic groups, trade networks and transnational organised criminal organisations.[51] Thus, this literature offers a useful starting point for an examination of the regional context of state failure. For reasons of space constraints, I shall focus on a select number of, in my view, particularly relevant contributions.

Lemke modifies and extends power transition theory to the interactions of minor powers in what he calls local hierarchies. He thus constructs a 'multiple hierarchy model' in which the dynamics of war and peace at each level of the model (overall international system and local hierarchies) are broadly similar in the absence of great power intervention.[52] Membership in local hierarchies, in Lemke's system, is defined by state's abilities to reach each other militarily (that is, to be potentially able to conquer each other's capital), which in turn is quantified by a revised version of Bruce Bueno de Mesquita's loss-of-strength-gradient formula.[53] This allows him to construct local hierarchies within the more traditional IR regions – four in South America, three in the Middle East, four in the Far East (along with three additional dyadic local hierarchies), and nine in Africa.[54]

Buzan and Wæver build on earlier work of their own and other scholars to develop a theory of international security in which so-called regional security complexes are the main building bloc.[55] Drawing on neo-classical realism and globalism, they develop a three-tiered scheme of the international security structure in the post-Cold War world with one superpower (USA) and four great powers (EU, Japan, China and Russia) acting at the system level and regional powers at the regional level.[56] A regional security complex is 'defined by durable patterns of

[47] Cf. Väyrynen, 'Regionalism'.
[48] Adler and Barnett, 'Security Communities'; Buzan and Wæver, 'Regions and Powers'; Lemke, 'Regions'.
[49] Ayoob, Ayoob, 'From Regional System to Regional Society'; Fawcett, 'The Evolving Architecture of Regionalisation'; Lake and Morgan, 'Regional Orders'; Roper, ''The Contribution'; Sperling and Kirchner, 'Recasting the European Order'.
[50] Diehl and Lepgold, 'Regional Conflict Management'; Duke, 'Regional Organisations'; MacFarlane, 'Regional Peacekeeping'.
[51] F. B. Adamson, 'Globalisation, Transnational Political Mobilisation, and Networks of Violence', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 18:1 (2005), pp. 31–49; L. Mincheva, 'Dissolving Boundaries between Domestic and Regional/ International Conflict: The Albanian Ethno-territorial Separatist Movement and the Macedonian 2001 Crisis', *Paper presented at the 42nd Annual Convention of the International Studies Association* (New Orleans, 2002), {http://isanet.ccit.arizona.edu/noarchive/mincheva.html} accessed on 4 August 2009; Pugh and Cooper, 'War Economies'; Rubin, 'Regional Approaches'.
[52] Lemke, 'Regions', pp. 52–3 and chap. 3 more generally.
[53] Ibid., pp. 68–81.
[54] These are listed in tabular form in Lemke, 'Regions', pp. 90–1. Because of the use of potential military interaction as definitional criterion, states can simultaneously be members of several local hierarchies. This is in contrast to Buzan and Wæver who argue that regional security complexes are mutually exclusive and not overlapping (Buzan and Wæver, 'Regions and Powers', p. 49).
[55] Buzan and Wæver, 'Regions of Power'.
[56] Ibid., pp. 27–39.

amity and enmity taking the form of sub-global, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence'.[57] Geographic proximity is said to matter more in terms of military, political, societal and environmental dimensions of security, less so in relation to economic ones.[58] The four main elements of any regional security complex are its boundaries, its anarchic structure (requiring a minimum of two autonomous units within it), polarity (uni-, bi-, and multi-polar power distributions), and its socially constructed patterns of amity and enmity.[59] Similar to Lemke, Buzan and Wæver emphasise that outside power penetration of a regional security complex is a factor that has an impact on the already existing 'pattern of rivalry, balance-of-power, and alliance[s] [. . .] among the main powers *within* a region.'[60] Regional security complexes are not considered static, but evolving in either one of three ways – maintenance of the *status quo*, internal transformation (changes to anarchic structure, polarity and socially constructed patterns of amity and enmity within existing boundaries), or external transformation (splitting up of a regional security complex or merger of two pre-existing ones).[61]

Buzan and Wæver, in contrast to Lemke, consider at least to some extent non-state actors in their analysis as well, and crucially so in the context of state weakness, noting that '[w]hen the states are weak and nonstate actors take on a relatively larger role, the question of the power of the units [. . .] should logically be asked of all units, state and nonstate. If some of the "other" units were strong and formed stable constellations of threat and vulnerability – e.g., transnational tribal groups – this would very well qualify' as a regional security complex.[62]

Like Lemke's approach, Buzan and Wæver's analysis, does not capture fully the increasing significance of non-state actors and their interplay with, and manipulation of and by state actors internal and external to a given region. This has its reason primarily in the state-centric approach taken by this literature. As states remain the main units of observation, the structure of regions, and their very definition is defined in terms of state capacity. In Lemke's approach this is manifest in his definition of local hierarchies as determined by states' capacity to threaten each other militarily and in Buzan and Wæver's definition of regional security complexes as a function of the units' power to generate security interdependence on a regional level.[63]

The security relevance of non-state actors is, however, captured in the work of other scholars. Barnett Rubin introduced the term 'regional conflict formation' into the debate in 2001, defining the phenomenon as 'sets of transnational conflicts that form mutually reinforcing linkages with each other throughout a region, making for more protracted and obdurate conflicts' and emphasising that they included 'regional military, political, economic, and social networks, which are in turn

[57] Ibid., p. 45.
[58] Ibid., p. 45–6.
[59] Ibid., p. 53.
[60] Ibid., p. 47. Emphasis in original.
[61] Ibid., p. 55.
[62] Ibid., p. 64.
[63] Note, as mentioned above, that Buzan and Wæver consider that non-state actors may be 'units' of observation as well. However, their delineation of the post-Cold War patterns of regional security in Africa admits that its specific representation 'overrepresents state territoriality and underrepresents nonstate actors' (Buzan and Wæver, 'Regions of Power', p. 231).

linked to global networks'.[64] Peter Wallensteen uses a similar term – regional conflict complex – to describe the phenomenon that 'three-quarters of all internal armed conflicts had an outside actor involved [. . .] which is further testimony to there being a significant regional dimension'.[65]

Mincheva, drawing on earlier work by, among others, Horowitz,[66] focuses on one particular type of trans-border actor, so-called ethno-territorial separatist movements, described as 'a transborder movement, composed of territorially contiguous but politically bi-sected ethnic communities' pursuing 'claims that transcend state borders' and thereby diffusing 'communal action across borders' and potentially causing 'domestic communal conflicts [to] spill over [into] the (regional) international system.' Such movements are further characterised as 'the political organization of regionally concentrated groups [who] wish to demonstrate cultural cohesiveness and political solidarity by contesting the ethnic legitimacy of existing state boundaries'.[67] As irredentism and secessionism are both possible objectives of ethno-territorial separatist movements, they potentially affect more than one state in the region, thus possibly instigating 'a series of inter-state conflicts and border disputes'.

Adamson presents a persuasive argument about how the increasing, globalisation-induced and -inducing mobility of people, goods, capital, ideas and information have combined to 'produce transnational resource bases and constituencies that can be tapped into by non-state political entrepreneurs in the process of political mobilisation'.[68] The consequences of the political challenges posed by the cross-border networks thus created are particularly damaging in weakly institutionalised states which in turn become the sources of broader regional and global security threats.[69] 'Because weakly institutionalised settings provide institutional incentives both for transnational political mobilisation and for the use of violence as a political tool by non-state actors, the weakness of states (including the lack of participatory institutions) comes to be seen as not simply a domestic problem for those states, but as a security threat.'[70]

2.2 Defining state failure regions

The Fund for Peace Failed States Index 2009 reveals, as did its predecessors, certain regional clusters in which state failure seems more prevalent (see Table 1). Unsurprisingly, sub-Saharan Africa has a high concentration of states vulnerable to failure. Within the geographic area of sub-Saharan Africa (and selected states straddling the boundary between sub-Saharan and North Africa) there are distinct

[64] Rubin, 'Regional Approaches'. For a more recent manifestation of this approach, see A. Armstrong and B. Rubin, 'The Great Lakes and South Central Asia', in S. Chesterman, M. Ignatieff, and R. Thakur, 'Making States Work', pp. 79–101.
[65] Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution* (London: Sage, 2007), p. 194, and ch. 8 more generally.
[66] D. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).
[67] Mincheva, 'Dissolving Boundaries'.
[68] Adamson, 'Globalisation', p. 33.
[69] Ibid., p. 43.
[70] Ibid., p. 44.

clusters of states threatened by failure that are more closely linked to one another than to others (for example, in the Karamojo Cluster; Horn of Africa; West Africa; Great Lakes Region). On a smaller scale, parts of Central and South Asia are another state failure cluster – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan – as is the Caucasus with Georgia (and the neighbouring republics in the south of the Russian Federation), Armenia and Azerbaijan.

It is important to note that even within such regional clusters state failure does not necessarily occur simultaneously in all states concerned. For example, Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced state failure during its civil war in the first half of the 1990s, Albania in 1997 following the collapse of a pyramid investment scheme, Serbia and Montenegro has seen continuous weakness for more than a decade and eventually split into two states, leaving Serbia fragmented in relation to Kosovo (followed by a subsequent, Western-backed, unilateral declaration of independence in 2008), while Macedonia was a weak state for most of the 1990s and at the brink of failure in 2001 during an armed rebellion by parts of its ethnic Albanian minority.

Likewise, one needs to note that there are also a number of geographically more isolated instances of state failure: for example, Sri Lanka and East Timor in Asia and the Pacific, and Haiti in the Americas. Yet, geographic contiguity should not be mistaken for actually existing patterns of interaction, while lack thereof does not necessarily invalidate the idea of region-level dynamics of state failure. For example, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, in earlier years considered highly vulnerable to state failure, may be geographically close, but relevant interaction is more obvious in the case of Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea/Bougainville (another case in point for local-regional connections), than between those two and Indonesia. A different perspective on the wider area of Southeast Asia and the Pacific would be to look at regional links through the prism of international terrorist and criminal networks that have tried and partly succeeded in establishing a foothold in various states, including Indonesia (Bali attacks), Philippines (Mindanao) and Thailand (Muslim provinces in the south). At the same time, the secessionist conflicts in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), Armenia/Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Moldova (Transnistria) may not be geographically contiguous, yet Russian involvement in all three of them indicates an obvious regional dimension. Furthermore, the links established between these conflicts and the resolution of the status of Kosovo also highlights global connections.

Bearing these empirical observations in mind, it is now necessary to progress towards an analytically more useful and conceptually more precise definition of region in the context of state failure. The existing literatures on regional dimensions of international security and on state failure reviewed above offer a good starting point for arriving at a definition of the regional in the state failure context. Military capability (Lemke), durable patterns of amity and enmity between state and non-state actors (Buzan and Wæver), sets of transnational conflicts forming mutually reinforcing linkages and including military, political, economic, and social networks at the regional level with links to the global level (Rubin), trans-border movements of politically organised, regionally concentrated groups contesting the legitimacy of existing boundaries (Mincheva) and transnational political mobilisation (Adamson) are all necessary elements in a definition of the

Africa:	Somalia (1), Zimbabwe (2), Sudan (3), Chad (4), Democratic Republic of the Congo (5), Central African Republic (8), Guinea (9), Ivory Coast (11), Kenya (14), Nigeria (15), Ethiopia (16), Uganda (21), Niger (23), Burundi (24), Cameroon (26), Guinea-Bissau (27), Malawi (28), Republic of Congo (30), Sierra Leone (32), Liberia (34), Burkina Faso (35), Eritrea (36)
Asia+Pacific:	Iraq (6), Afghanistan (7), Pakistan (10), Burma (13), North Korea (17), Bangladesh (18), Yemen (19), East Timor (20), Sri Lanka (22), Nepal (25), Lebanon (29), Iran (38), Uzbekistan (31), Tajikistan (37)
Americas:	Haiti (12)
Europe:	Georgia (33)

Source: Fund for Peace, Failed States Index 2009[72]

Table 1. *The thirty-eight states most vulnerable to failure according to the Fund for Peace Failed States Index 2009*[71]

regional dimension of state failure. Put in a more abstract way, regions are areas 'in which *interactions* [are] more intense than at the global level'.[73] This means that we can empirically identify member states of a region as those who have closer ties with one another than with other countries, including in their own immediate neighbourhood.[74] Thus, for example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) could not be considered a member of a state failure region in the wider Horn of Africa as, apart from Uganda (and sporadically Sudan), it has very little interaction with other states in this region, despite geographical contiguity.[75]

State failure here is defined as inability of state institutions to enforce a monopoly on the legitimate use of force *vis-à-vis* an existing population and across the entire territory within the internationally recognised boundaries of a state. 'Regionalising' this process requires an assessment of the factors that both cause states to lose this essential means of their existence and to identify which categories in turn are affected by this, as well as to analyse which of these are external to a given state but located in its neighbourhood. This requires considering the key element of Lemke's definition of local hierarchies – states other than the great powers that pose a military threat to a given state – and combine it with Rubin's, Mincheva's and Adamson's emphasis on non-state actors operating at the regional level, that is, military, political, economic, social, and as a subcategory of the latter, ethnic networks, that is, the non-state sources of threat.

[71] Arranged according to geographic location, global ranking in parenthesis.

[72] The Fund for Peace, *Failed States Index 2009*, {http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=391&Itemid=549} accessed on 3 August 2009.

[73] D. Allen, 'The Context of Foreign Policy Systems: The Contemporary International Environment', in Michael Clarke and Brian White (eds), *Understanding Foreign Policy* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1989), pp. 60–83, here p. 68.

[74] For the most part, it is unlikely that state failure regions will not be geographically contiguous. However, as noted above, one could conceptually explore the possibility of clustering Georgia and Moldova – two non-neighbouring successor states of the former Soviet Union – into one state failure cluster (fragmented states) because one of the factors that contributes to their fragmentation (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) is Russian policy in the so-called near abroad.

[75] As discussed below, this underscores the importance of disaggregating the state level and introducing a sub-state level of analysis. Dertwinkel and Lambach's analysis of the DRC shows precisely why, on the basis of a geographic mapping of 'state failure events', the DRC should not be considered part of a (Greater) Horn of Africa state failure region. Cf. T. Dertwinkel and D. Lambach, 'Breaking Down Breakdown'.

Two further elements, rarely mentioned in the literature outside the development discourse, are environmental factors and 'economic proximity costs' or spill-over costs.[76] In addition, and not unrelated to the last two sets of factors mentioned, are certain geographical conditions, such as states being landlocked and dependent on neighbours for trade access to the open sea, riparian states dependent on the same water supply source as their neighbours, and dependency on oil pipelines for energy supplies or revenues from transit rights. For example, state weakness in the wider Horn of Africa can potentially be exacerbated by several countries' dependency on a common water resource – the Nile.[77]

Delineating the regional context of state failure in terms of threats emanating from other states with appropriate military capabilities and non-state actors posing a challenge to a given state's sovereignty (that is, its control over the territory within its internationally recognised boundaries) also implies that regions in the state failure context remain state centric, not only because states remain for the time being the predominant (if not the only) form of territorial organisation but also because state failure is only a meaningful category of analysis in the context of these units, with the obvious caveat that there are clear sub-state and regional, as well as global effects and interactions. Thus, spatially, state failure regions are entirely composed of (most likely contiguous) states, while functionally, or at the actor level, they include only specific states (those with an appropriate military capability) and additionally non-state actors who are capable of challenging existing states for empirical sovereignty. This means that, seen from the perspective of a state at risk of failure, its relevant region may include both militarily threatening states as well as states from within whose borders threatening non-state actors are able to operate be it because of mal-intent or loss of empirical sovereignty by that neighbour's institutions. According to the wider range of factors considered here, neighbouring states that are the source of potential environmental threats would also form part of the relevant region, if these are likely to undermine the states affected in their capacity to enforce their monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force on their territory.

Such a definition, therefore, conceptually extends beyond Lemke's local hierarchies, but is narrower than the vast regional security complexes established by Buzan and Wæver.[78] Both of these other conceptions of 'region' remain relevant, however. Lemke's concept provides a key ingredient in the definition of state failure region, while Buzan and Wæver's regional security complexes demarcate the outer limits of potentially contiguous and overlapping state failure regions. In the same way in which in Lemke's definition one state could potentially be a member of different local hierarchies simultaneously, states can also belong to different state failure regions. For example, a Greater Horn of Africa region would

[76] Chauvet, Collier and Hoeffler, 'Paradise Lost'.

[77] In 1993, Egypt, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire formed the Technical Cooperative Committee for the Promotion of the Development and Environmental Protection of the Nile Basin (TECCONILE); Ethiopia, Kenya, Burundi and Eritrea subsequently joined as observers. By 1998, this evolved into the Technical Advisory Committee (Nile-TAC), in which now eight riparian countries (all except Eritrea and DRC) formally participated. In 1999, the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was established as a regional partnership of nine states (all except Eritrea).

[78] At an empirical level, state failure regions in my conceptualisation are quite similar, if not identical, to what Buzan and Wæver describe, for example, as the 'Central Asian subcomplex', 'Balkan subcomplex' or 'Caucasus mini-complex' (Buzan and Wæver, 'Regions and Powers').

include Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda, while the latter two could also be a component of neighbouring regions, respectively comprising Sudan, Chad, and the Central African Republic; and Uganda, the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi.

3. Analysing state failure as a regional phenomenon: a levels-of-analysis approach

In 1961, J. David Singer published an article in *World Politics* entitled 'The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations' in which he made a strong case for distinguishing between systemic (global) and subsystem (nation-state) levels for the analysis of various processes in the international system.[79] While Singer offers good general guidance on the level-of-analysis approach, his counsel is primarily geared towards deciding which one of the two levels that he identifies should be chosen, rather than giving scholars and analysts a choice of combining one or more levels in their analysis. Two years earlier, Kenneth N. Waltz, had offered a consideration of three images (that is, levels of analysis) in accounting for the occurrence of war, and had suggested that neither human nature nor the aggressive behaviour of states alone accounted for war, but rather that the nature of the international system and the expectation of violence within it led to war.[80] As Jack Levy has pointed out, the levels-of-analysis approach, in the tradition of Singer and Waltz, was subsequently mostly used in International Relations scholarship to classify 'independent variables that explain state foreign policy behaviour and international outcomes.'[81] Levy also emphasises that '[i]t is logically possible and in fact usually desirable for explanations to combine causal variables from different levels of analysis, because whether war or peace occurs is usually determined by multiple variables operating at more than one level of analysis.'[82] Despite the traditional focus on states and their relations with one another, there is nothing inherent in the levels-of-analysis approach that would prohibit the extension of its application to non-state actors and structures and to a range of 'issues' that fall somewhere outside the actor and structure dichotomy.

The levels-of-analysis model that is proposed here for the study of state failure can be useful in two ways. It can be employed to study state failure as the dependent variable. In other words, it can be used to answer questions about which factors at any of the levels of analysis individually or in combination cause state failure. Yet, it can also serve its purpose as an analytical tool for research designs in which state failure is the independent variable; that is, to investigate questions about the impact of state failure on any one or more factors at any one or more levels of analysis.

The definition of state failure adopted here as synonymous with a lack of empirical sovereignty gives useful indications as to what levels of analysis are

[79] J. D. Singer, 'The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations', *World Politics*, 14:1 (1961), pp. 77–92.
[80] K. N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).
[81] J. S. Levy, 'Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War: A Levels-of-Analysis Approach', in C. Crocker, F. O. Hampson, and P. Aall (eds), *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2001), pp. 3–27, here p. 4.
[82] Ibid.

appropriate to consider. First, and most obvious, there is the level of the state itself where many of the contests for empirical sovereignty are conducted. Likewise, the discussion of state failure in much of the International Security literature makes it clear that state failure (and its consequences) is a serious and increasing threat to the stability and security of the international system as a whole.[83] These two levels of analysis – 'unit' and 'system' in neo-realist parlance[84] – are relatively uncontested in the literature on state failure. Yet, the question is how useful they are as an analytical model for the study of such a complex phenomenon. My contention is that both these levels can become more useful if they are further disaggregated by adding a sub-state and a regional level. This can be justified empirically and analytically, as well as with reference to an existing body of literature.[85]

State failure, in addition to being a phenomenon observable at the state level, also has a sub-state dimension as contests for empirical sovereignty are not always conducted across the entire territory for which juridical sovereignty is claimed.[86] In other words, not all such contests are necessarily about control of the entire state, but some of them can also be for parts of a given state's territory. This idea of the fragmented state (in other words, a state that only partially upholds a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence) is often connected with secessionist conflicts; that is, conflicts in which one party seeks to claim empirical *and* juridical sovereignty for a specific territory (such as Tamils in Sri Lanka, Kosovo Albanians in Serbia, Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo). Other instances of fragmented states are linked with natural resource exploitation and/or predation: for example, oil- or diamond-rich parts of a state's territory may experience locally-concentrated struggles for control of these resources involving local actors, state actors, and/or outside forces or their local proxies (such as the eastern part of the DRC). In some cases, local control of resources is instrumental for a full-scale assault on the empirical sovereignty of an existing state, that is, for complete state control (for example, Charles Taylor's struggle for control of Liberia).

For the purposes of studying state failure, the employment of 'region' as an analytical category is empirically appropriate and analytically useful because there

[83] For example, Nicholson, 'The Potentiality'; Patrick, 'Failed States'; Patrick, 'Weak States'; Piazza, 'Incubators of Terror'; Rotberg, 'State Failure'; Rotberg, 'When States Fail'; Schneckener, 'States at Risk'.

[84] K. N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

[85] On the one hand, there is a significant body of literature concerned with the study of ethnic conflict that takes this approach, for example, M. E. Brown (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996); R. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); D. Smith, 'Framing the National Question in Central and Eastern Europe: A Quadratic Nexus?', *Ethnopolitics*, 2:1 (2002), pp. 3–16; and S. Wolff, *Disputed Territories: The Transnational Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict Resolution* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2001). On the other hand, Buzan and Wæver, in a recent 'update' of their securitisation theory, note that '[a] regional security complex is always embedded in, and thus dependent on, the constant reproduction of social identities at lower levels and often also bound up with regional-global and occasionally inter-regional relations. Thus, a regional security complex – while its essential structure is defined by relations among its units at the regional level and by the complex's external boundary, always exists within, and as the core of, a wider constellation.' Cf. B. Buzan and O. Wæver, 'Macrosecuritisation and Security Constellations: Reconsidering Scale in Securitisation Theory', *Review of International Studies*, 35:2, pp. 253–76, here p. 257.

[86] For an analysis of 'spatial variation' across different criteria of performance outputs of states, see Dertwinkel and Lambach, 'Breaking Down Breakdown'.

are clear links between the local and state levels of analysis, on the one hand, and a regional level of analysis, on the other. For example, identity groups divided by state borders may support each other in various struggles for rights, development, a share in, or control over, local resources, secession, etc. This can affect groups who do not control any state themselves (for example, the Kurds), or who control the state in one country, but are minorities in another (for example, Serbs in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). When it comes to religiously defined groups, majority-majority configurations are also conceivable, as is the case with Shi'a in Iran and neighbouring Iraq. Local-regional connections can also exist through distribution of natural resources – the uneven distribution of grazing land in the Karamojo cluster has led to frequent clashes between groups in an area straddling Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan in which none of these four states exercise permanent empirical sovereignty. Diamond and precious mineral concentrations in the eastern part of the DRC have attracted criminal gangs in pursuit of easily lootable commodities from neighbouring Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. The latter example at the same time also exemplifies links between the state and regional levels: neighbouring states, in particular Uganda have used proxies and on some occasions regular armed forces to obtain control over local mines in the eastern DRC.

These empirical examples also establish a need to distinguish between a regional and a global level of analysis, rather than to subsume both of them into a single 'external' category. For example, links between the state level and regional level in Iraq clearly highlight the different impact of, and on, factors at the global level of analysis. Thus, the multinational coalition of forces in Iraq were differently affected by Iraq's failure as a state in the first years after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and had a different impact on it, than the terrorists of *al-Qaeda*. Also, the inability of Iraq to supply oil and gas at levels that one would expect in relation to its reserves in many ways benefits its resource-rich neighbours in the region (as well as other oil- and gas-producing countries elsewhere in the world), but carries a cost for the global economy.

State failure is, thus, best studied as a phenomenon that is caused by, and has consequences for, agents and structures at sub-state, state, regional and global levels, as well as a range of 'issues' that cannot easily be classified as either actor- or structure related. These include environmental degradation, resource scarcity, energy security, food security, communicable diseases, etc., all of which by their very nature can not easily be 'assigned' to one particular level of analysis, but rather straddle several levels. As an analytical model, this approach is summarised in Table 2.

Conclusion

Stewart Patrick has recently asserted that

> [t]he scholarly community has an important role to play in elucidating the diverse sources and expressions of state fragility; clarifying and mapping the connection between particular forms of weakness and specific transnational 'spillovers'; and placing any linkages in the context of an integrated global system in which causality may flow in multiple directions.[87]

[87] Patrick, 'Failed States', p. 645.

	State Structures and Actors	Non-state Structures and Actors	'Issues'
Local	• local elites/leaders, authorities and representatives of the central government • institutional arrangements (including distribution of political power and judicial practices) • socio-economic structures (including resource allocation/ distribution)	• locally resident communities/ethnic groups/religious groups and their elites/leaders • locally operating NGOs, rebel forces, private sector interest groups, and criminals • demographic settlement patterns	
National	• national elites/leaders, central government, • institutional arrangements (including distribution of political power and judicial practices) • socio-economic structures (including resource allocation/ distribution)	• communities/ethnic groups/religious groups and their elites/leaders • state-wide operating NGOs, rebel forces, private sector interest groups, and criminals • demographic settlement patterns	• environmental degradation • resource scarcity • energy security • food security • communicable diseases
Regional	• neighbouring states and their institutions • regional powers, and regional IOs, as well as their respective elites/leaders; • structures of political and economic cooperation	• cross-border/ transnational networks (ethnic, religious, civil society, business, organised crime, rebel groups, etc.) and their elites/leaders • demographic settlement patterns	
Global	• powerful states and IOs of global reach and impact and their elites/leaders	• INGOs, diaspora groups, international organised crime networks, and TNCs, as well as their respective elites/leaders	

Table 2. *The levels-of-analysis approach to the study of state failure*

Studying state failure as a regional phenomenon, and developing the necessary analytical tools to do so, can bring a variety of gains in knowledge and understanding along those lines. The first such gain is closely related to a lack of consensus over what constitutes a weak, fragile, failing or failed state: there is some common ground among academics and practitioners about clear-cut cases of state collapse, and combining this consensus with a regional approach might make

debates over other states that are variably considered to be somewhere on the road to failure/collapse with no precise agreement on the point at which they are superfluous. Defining a state failure region would empirically include these states regardless of what their momentary levels of empirical sovereignty are and highlight the fact that there is a broader regional problem in need of addressing. Consequently, second, 'regionalising' state failure leads to a more precise definition of what 'region' means in the context of state failure, that is, what the spatial and functional dimensions and extent of relevant regions are.

Thus, third, and closely related to the first two anticipated gains, understanding spatial and functional dimensions of regions in the state failure context can generate a better understanding of regional structures, actors and dynamics and of their impact on processes of state failure and *vice versa*. With regional dimensions more clearly defined and structures, actors and dynamics more clearly determined, that is, with a more thorough distinction of the regional from the state and global levels, 'regionalising' the state failure debate would also imply arriving at a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between the different levels of analysis (local, state, regional, global) and the factors that can be attributed to them in causing, managing and preventing state failure.

Finally, using a regional approach to state failure can in future research be used for more systematic cross-regional comparisons in an effort to investigate similarities and dissimilarities across regional patterns of state failure, and the analytical model developed here offers an opportunity to do so.