

Kobi Michael – Yoel Guzansky¹:

THE ARAB FAILED STATE PHENOMENON AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER

ABSTRACT: In our today international system, we cannot disconnect geographical and political dimensions any longer; the local cannot be disconnected from the regional and international. The international order is affected by local and distant disorders and chaotic situations, the atrocities conducted by ISIS in Syria and Iraq or the Somali pirates' raids in the Red Sea are like the "Butterfly Effect" that begins in distant areas and ends with a tornado storm in Europe, America and East Asia. The international order of today is threatened by a spectrum of security threats as well as by migrations flow that begins in the turbulent Middle East and undermines European countries' internal and societal order and endangers the fragile bond of the EU as such. These trends evoke a "Giants struggle" between Russia and the West (USA and its Western allies) begins in Syria and ends in Ukraine. Is it a common denominator for all these threats? Is there one major generator for them?

KEYWORDS: failed states, fragile states, Arab upheaval, jihadism, crisis export

INTRODUCTION

In my recent book *The Arab World on the Road to State Failure* (2016) I focus on the phenomenon of failed state as an explanatory concept for the Arab Upheaval and its implications over the regional and international order. I do believe that both American presidents (Barak H. Obama and George W. Bush) identified correctly the real danger that America has to tackle. Both declared that the real threat for America's national security is failed states.

Failed states export security threats and instability both to their close and distant environments. They become greenhouses for extremist Jihadi terrorism. They are the biggest generator of humanitarian crises, displaced people and refugees, they endanger the regime stability in their neighboring countries, they enable access to wmd stolen from the collapsing state's military facilities, and they encourage subversive activities among Muslim communities in Western countries in a way that destabilizes the internal social order.

These changes are having a global impact: they are undermining global security and deepening the rifts between the superpowers (such as between the US and Russia as a result of NATO's intervention in Libya and the Russian intervention in Syria) and between the superpowers and their allies in the region (the crises in US-Egyptian and US-Saudi Arabian relations).

Therefore, failed states become an international challenge to tackle and the response cannot remain only a military one. In order to tackle such a complex political, societal, economic, and security challenge, the international community has to shape a comprehensive

¹ The article is based on Kobi Michael's and Yoel Guzansky, "The Arab World on the Road to State Failure", *Institute for National Security Studies*, Tel-Aviv University, 2016.

approach based on broad and deep cooperation between international actors as well as with local actors. Intellectual, operational and economic efforts and resources should be devoted for a long period, understanding that it is going to be a continuing process; there are no magic and rapid moves and solutions.

THE FAILED STATE PHENOMENON AND THE ARAB WORLD²

The phenomenon of the failed state in the Arab world is not a new one; it existed even before the current upheaval in the region. However, as a result of the upheaval the situation of states that were already in various stages of failure has deteriorated. The Arab upheaval has undermined the geopolitical logic that structures the Arab world. This logic rests on the organization of states based on the territorial nation-state model, which includes an authoritative central government and clear borders. Several of these states, such as Yemen, Libya and Syria, no longer exist in the form of a functioning state with a central government capable of imposing its authority in most parts of its territory. These states have become arenas of violent and bloody conflicts. The weakness of their central governments has led to the expansion of ungoverned peripheries that have enabled Jihadi organizations and foreign elements to penetrate the territory of these states, to challenge central governments and systematically undermine state structures.

The Arab territorial nation-states were created on artificial basis by the winning superpowers of WWI that imposed the European nation state model on the region and its inhabitants. The idea was align to the local political culture and from the very beginning the Arab nation states suffered from unrest and instability. The Arab republics remained relatively stable because their dictators ruled with an iron hand. In addition, they tried to achieve legitimacy by establishing social ideologies (such as Nasserite socialism whose central component was the redistribution of wealth in Egypt) and national ideologies (such as pan-Arabism) alongside the reinforcement of national sentiment and historical roots. Thus, for example, Saddam Hussein, the ruler of Iraq, tried to create a myth according to which the Iraqi people are the descendants of the Babylonians. However, the sources of legitimacy and mechanisms of control that developed over the years were not able to withstand the mass protests and the regional upheaval and many "national creations" have now fragmented into their basic components.

The trends of rapid globalization, the collapse of the USSR (which had been a stabilizing global force), the widening of the Sunni-Shiite rift in the Arab world and the rise of the Salafi-Jihadi organizations, including Al Qaeda and ISIS, accelerated the disintegration of the Arab nation-states.

The mass terrorist attacks that took place in the US on September 11th 2001 — following a series of smaller-scale attacks against American targets in the Middle East and Africa — led to the realization in the West, and in the US in particular, that a failed state is in most cases also an international problem since it becomes an exporter of unrestrained terror. As a result of these terrorist attacks, President George Bush Jr. declared war on global terror. In the first stage, the US invaded Afghanistan, where Al Qaeda had found refuge. About two years later, in 2003, the US invaded Iraq on the basis of the belief that the Iraqi regime

² The term Arab World actually is not valid anymore, because there is no such an entity these days. I use the term just for generalization I make with regard to the Arab territorial nation states with an emphasis on the Arab republics.

supported global terror and possessed weapons of mass destruction. The invasion of Iraq, the disbanding of its army, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's government, and the US military and civilian presence in Iraq (which lasted eight years) turned Iraq into a failed state and signaled to the Arab societies that tyrants could be removed from power. The disintegration of Iraq reached a peak when ISIS took control of the northwestern part of the country and declared the establishment of a state there in June 2014.

Thanks to the grassroots movements that had developed over the years and the widespread use of social networks, which made it possible to quickly and efficiently organize large numbers of people, a local demonstration in the capital of Tunis became a torch that ignited the flames of protests throughout Tunisia and then the rest of the Arab world. At first, the spreading protests were accompanied by high hopes. This was reflected in the term "Arab Spring" that expressed the expectation of social and political changes in the Arab countries and the adoption of values such as freedom, democracy and equal rights. But eventually, the Arab Spring became a regional upheaval whose end is not in sight yet. It would not be an exaggeration to assume that during the next five years instability will increase in the Middle East and countries that are still functioning at a reasonable level will also deteriorate to the stage of state failure and become areas of intensifying conflicts.

As the nation-states in the Middle East continue to disintegrate, the power of non-state actors, and in particular ISIS and other radical Sunni movements, has increased. These non-state actors are exploiting the vacuum created by the weakness of the central governments in many countries in order to establish their influence. Some of them have even become semi-state that rule territory and provide inhabitants with at least some of the services that a state provides.

The non-state actors are undermining the logic of the Arab territorial nation-state and are seeking to reshape the Arab world (as the first stage of the global caliphate). They are erasing existing borders and establishing new entities, such as the Sunni Islamic Caliphate (the Islamic State) and the independent Shiite enclaves (Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen) which are loyal to Iran and benefit from Iranian support. The expected improvement in Iran's economy as a result of the nuclear agreement signed in July 2015 is exploited by Iran in order to undermine the stability of the Sunni regimes in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which in turn is expected to undermine the stability of the region even further.

WHAT IS A FAILED STATE?

The phenomenon of the failed state has received an increasing attention in the professional literature in recent decades. In the professional literature, there are currently several terms to describe the situation of a failed state, a fact that to some extent reflects the nature of the debate among researchers in the field. Alongside the commonly used term of the "failed state",³ there are other terms in use, such as "fragile state",⁴ "collapsed state", "state fail-

³ Guzansky, Y. and Kulick, A. "The failed state: Ramifications for Israel's strategic environment", *Adken Estrategi*, Volume 13, No. 2, August 2010, p. 1, <https://goo.gl/uchSY4>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

⁴ Cooke, J. G. and Dowine, R. "Rethinking Engagement in Fragile States, A Report of the CSIS Africa Program," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, July 2015, 1, <https://goo.gl/L6a4Na>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

ing” and “crisis state”.⁵ A similar term, “fragile and conflict-affected” state,⁶ is used by the British government.

A state is defined as “failed” when it demonstrates little or no ability to provide its citizens with human security (the UN’s definition).⁷ A failed state is characterized by a weak central government that is unable to govern. A weak government is one whose legitimacy is limited or non-existent and which does not enjoy a monopoly on the means of violence. According to Charles Call, a state becomes a failed state when its institutions and authority, both internally and externally, have collapsed.⁸

The various definitions recognized in the literature are based on the logic derived from functioning states and therefore it is important to also clarify the definition of a functioning state in order for it to serve as a reference point for the discussion of the failed state phenomenon. A functioning state operates on the basis of “stateness”⁹ and exhibits its ability to govern. The term “governance” reflects the quality of the functioning of state institutions and the degree to which they enforce laws, rules and regulations so as to enable the state to exercise its sovereignty, enforce its authority, provide security (both internal and external), law and order, healthcare and education and maintain an efficient economy. A failed state is unable to provide these basic services.

William Zartman has analyzed the phenomenon of the failed state, which he views as a risk and a challenge to the international community. According to him, the phenomenon has two dimensions: an *institutional-governmental dimension* and a *social dimension*.¹⁰ These two dimensions are intertwined: in the social dimension, the regime loses its legitimacy while in the institutional-governmental dimension it loses its ability to function and govern. As a result, law and order collapse, so that other entities (usually competitors and rivals) attempt to take over the regime or some parts of it.

A state in the process of collapse is characterized by the paralysis of decision making and the disintegration of social cohesion. The state is not able to maintain sovereignty or security within its territory. Under these conditions, the state ceases to be socioeconomically relevant in the eyes of the population. Thus, residents no longer expect to receive basic services from the state which has lost the ability to provide them. Therefore, in a failed state both governance and the civil infrastructure collapse simultaneously.

Michael Hudson has examined the stability and strength of states on a spectrum from fragile states to stable and dynamic states on the basis of two variables: the degree of political fragmentation (which is reflected in identity politics) and the degree of governmental

⁵ Guzansky and Kulick, *ibid.* The definition of Rachel Gisselquist is “the most extreme form of fragility, state collapse”. See Gisselquist, R. M. “Varieties of fragility: implications for aid,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 7, July 2015, 1271, <https://goo.gl/36QiEY>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

⁶ Roberts, A. *Fragile States: A Concept with a History – Rethinking State Fragility*, The British Academy, London 2015, 28.

⁷ And paragraph 143 of the “Human Security” section of the UN World Summit Outcome Resolution states as follows: “We stress the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. We recognize that all individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential.” <https://goo.gl/HPftjs>

⁸ Call, C. *ibid.*, 1492.

⁹ Fukuyama, F. *State Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century*, London, Profile Books, 2005, 1-3.

¹⁰ Zartman, W. I. *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Colorado, Lynne Rienner, 1995, 1-11.

effectiveness. Like Zartman, he also comes to the conclusions that when there is a low level of effectiveness and a high level of fragmentation, there is a substantial danger to the stability of the state.¹¹

Every failed state has three prominent characteristics: weak governance and a lack of legitimacy, extreme poverty and prolonged domestic conflict. According to one of the most important indexes of failed states, 33 states are defined as “fragile” or “in an advanced process of collapse”.¹² The majority of the states in the most advanced stage of failure are Moslem and are located in Africa (sub-Sahara) and the Middle East. The same index for 2015 includes even more Arab states at higher levels of state failure,¹³ while in the index for 2016, Syria, Yemen and Iraq are at highest levels ever.¹⁴

Another prominent characteristic of failed states is ethnic and religious divisions and the lack of a unifying national ethos. A clear example is Afghanistan which is a culturally diverse state with numerous ethnic groups. The fact that these groups have been forced to live one beside the other in a single state framework has created unending friction and conflicts, which have made the state into a killing field of armed militias continually fighting one another, despite the fact that they have a common denominator, i.e. the Islamic religion. Syria, Iraq, Libya and Lebanon are also examples of this. Each of them is divided along ethnic or religious lines and they lack a unifying national ethos.

The lack of correlation between nation and state, which Benjamin Miller defines as “state-to-nation imbalance”, is a major cause of regional instability and domestic and regional conflicts.¹⁵ This is particularly true if the various nations or ethnic groups aspire to independence or view themselves as belonging to a neighboring state. In contrast, a country characterized by correlation between nation and territory is more stable from the start.

FAILED STATES AND FOREIGN INTERVENTION

A domestic conflict within a multicultural state usually “invites” foreign intervention, whether by neighboring countries or by the superpowers. Examples of this are Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen. Furthermore, state failure tends to spill from one country to another. This is liable to occur due to lax border control or because there are identical ethnic or religious groups on both sides of the border.¹⁶ This is occurring, for example, in Iraq and Syria where the Kurds and the Islamic State, among others, are operating on both sides of the border.

One of the main indicators of the weakening of the central government is an inability to impose its authority on its peripheral regions and on its borders. Terror groups that are fighting among themselves and with the central government enter the governmental vacuum and the result is often hardship for the civilian population and mass migration to safer locations. A failed state therefore becomes a global problem. Thus, terror never remains within the borders of the failed state and the masses of fleeing refugees eventually are dispersed

¹¹ Hudson, M. “Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy”, *Yale University Press*, New Haven, CT, 1977, 391.

¹² *The Annual Fragile States Index*, The Fund for Peace, 2014, <https://goo.gl/gMIY5J>

¹³ *The Annual Fragile States Index*, The Fund for Peace, 2015, <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2015>

¹⁴ *The Annual Fragile States Index*, The Fund for Peace, 2016, <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2016>

¹⁵ Miller, B. “When and How Regions Become Peaceful: Potential Theoretical Pathways to Peace,” *The International Studies Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 2005, 229-267, <https://goo.gl/wNzOG0>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

¹⁶ This claims supplements the claim brought up by Zartman with respect to the regional effects of failed states and which were presented in an earlier part of this survey.

among a large number of countries. In other words, every failed state is a threat to the world order to one extent or another.¹⁷

David Reilly claims that globalization, particularly during the last two decades, has been a major factor in the deterioration of Third World countries to the lowest rankings on the functionality index. Because of globalization Third World populations are familiar with the lifestyle in the First World and are demanding that their governments provide them with what they see on their smartphones, on their laptops and on television, i.e. human rights, security, a prosperous economy, education, advanced infrastructure, etc. Third World regimes that are unable to provide this lose legitimacy and encounter growing unrest. In order to survive, these regimes increase their measures of oppression and from there it is a short distance to becoming a failed state.¹⁸

The criteria for identifying a failed state can be divided into two categories: internal and external. The former can further be classified into three main subcategories: demographic, economic and structural. After six years of upheaval in the Middle East, it should be noted that several of the criteria defined as internal are essentially external. Thus, for example, in the case of the flight of millions of Syrian refugees to neighboring countries, the reasons for their flight were mainly internal but they became an external factor undermining the stability of the destination countries.¹⁹

The establishment of the Islamic State and its terrorist regime is what led to the massive exodus of the civilian population. As already mentioned, the refugees are a destabilizing factor. Not all of the refugees leave Iraq for other countries. Many of them arrive in other regions of the country and become an enormous burden on the central government, thus weakening it even further and accelerating the processes of fragmentation and collapse.²⁰ This situation is exploited by other ethnic groups, such as the Kurds, who had established an autonomous region for themselves even prior to the regional upheaval. They took advantage of the upheaval in order to expand their territory and gain control of essential economic resources, thus further weakening the central government and state institutions, and so on. This is essentially a vicious cycle of destruction that fuels itself.

David Reilly writes that the phenomenon of the failed state is not expected to disappear from the international scene anytime in the near future and that the confrontation between functioning wealthier nations and the failed states is inevitable.²¹ Terrorist organizations are able to "export" security threats by terror from the territory of the failed states to the functioning wealthier nations, even when they have no common border with the failed states. Globalization, technology and access to state weapons arsenals, including weapons of mass destruction, enable the terrorist organizations to engage in international terror and to spread chaos at very little cost and with relative ease. As a result, "...weak states, like Afghanistan,

¹⁷ For more details on the adverse effects of the Syrian refugee crisis, see: Berti, B. "Syrian Refugees and Regional Security," *SADA Middle East Analysis*, February 5, 2015, <https://goo.gl/mxfHiC>. Berti writes as follows: "worst humanitarian disaster since the end of the Cold War." Indeed, these humanitarian implications are also strategic, both in terms of regional stability and the ability of Syria's neighbors to be effective partners against the Islamic State."

¹⁸ Reilly. "The Two-Level Game of Failing States," <https://goo.gl/qRZDpL>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

¹⁹ Berti, B. "The Refugee Crisis in Syria: Ramifications for Personal and Regional Security", *Adken Estrategi*, Volume 17, No. 4, January 2015, <https://goo.gl/kIxu0O>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

²⁰ Rivlin, P. "The Humanitarian Catastrophe in Syria and Iraq", *Ekstadi*, Volume 5, No. 1, January 2015, <https://goo.gl/FtIxr>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

²¹ Reilly. "The Two-Level Game of Failing States," 17, <https://goo.gl/qRZDpL>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states."²² The Islamic State which is operating in the Sinai Peninsula, Libya, the Gaza Strip, Yemen, Nigeria and many other locations by means of its affiliates, that is, local organizations that have joined it and sworn allegiance to its leader, who calls himself "Caliph", is an example. Other examples include the pirates in Somalia, who have disrupted international shipping off the coast of Africa, or the terror exported from Yemen to its neighbors and even to Europe and North America.

As already mentioned, failed states are usually unable to provide human security²³ and this is one of the main reasons for the massive wave of refugees. There are refugees who flee to safer parts of their own country ("displaced") but there are many more, who flee to other countries. The refugees fleeing to other regions in their own country further increase the burden on the infrastructures, which in any case are barely functioning or in a state of collapse. Clearly, they also create pressure on the infrastructures of the destination countries, even if they are placed in crowded refugee camps near the border.²⁴

The refugee camps provide the setting for humanitarian crises. Their occupants suffer from poor nutrition, disease, violence and unemployment. As a result, the refugee camps become centers of unrest that "export" instability to the host country. In Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey there are large refugee camps that contain hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria. These refugees, and particularly those in Jordan and Lebanon, increase the risk of failure of the host state.

The export of instability by means of waves of refugees threatens not only countries in the Middle East, which even before the civil war in Syria were fragile,²⁵ but also stable functioning states in the EU. Currently, the EU is finding it difficult to deal with this phenomenon, which may eventually lead to its dissolution. There are those who claim that if the EU acts to alleviate the poverty in the regions of instability on its eastern and southern borders, this will reduce the phenomenon of failed states and will diminish the number of refugees. However, this proposal ignores the reality that the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan are not fleeing poverty.²⁶

Another aspect, and of no less concern, is the export of terror, particularly chemical, biological and nuclear terror. It has been claimed that in July 2014 the Islamic State took control of stockpiles of low-grade uranium in Iraq.²⁷ The main concern is that countries with arsenals of non-conventional weapons will become failed states, which will allow terrorist organizations to take control of these arsenals. There will be almost unimaginable harm to humanity if the situation in Pakistan for example enables Jihadi organizations to get their hands on stockpiles of nonconventional weapons. The threat from the disintegration of Syria would have been much worse if the regime had had the nuclear capabilities that it tried to develop.

²² *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2002, <https://goo.gl/yDDqEQ>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

²³ Guzansky, Y. and Berti, B. "The Arab Awakening and the 'Cascade' of Failing States: Dealing with Post-Revolutionary Stabilization Challenges," *Harvard Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy*, Vol. 2, spring 2013, 35-51, <https://goo.gl/pRpek0>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

²⁴ Berti, B. "Syrian Refugees and Regional Security," <https://goo.gl/mxfHiC36>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

²⁵ Mühlberger, W. "The State of Arab Statehood - Reflections on Failure, Resilience and Collapse", *EuroMeSCo*, September 2015, 9, <https://goo.gl/gkiQPG>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

²⁶ Castillejo, C. "Fragile States: An Urgent Challenge for EU Foreign Policy", *FRIDE, A European Think Tank for Global Action*, 2015, 1-4, <https://goo.gl/khtxxq>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

²⁷ Michelle, N. "Exclusive: Iraq tells U.N. that 'terrorist groups' seized nuclear materials," *Reuters*, July 9, 2014, <https://goo.gl/hwH6jr>

FAILED STATES' IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INSTABILITY

Eventually, terror, guerilla warfare and civil wars have become a major security challenge for humanity since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, since 1945 more people have died in such conflicts than in the wars fought by conventional armies.²⁸ Another major process since the Cold War is the growing power of non-state armed groups at the expense of state power. This is happening as a result of globalization, among other reasons, and the dispersion of state authority and functions among, for the most part, non-state actors.²⁹

Non-state actors that become entrenched in one country seek to expand their influence to neighboring ones as well and to do so they exploit conflicts between ethnic and religious groups in those countries. For example, after the fall of Kaddafi, groups of extremists from the Tuareg tribes that had fought on the side of the regime fled to Mali (via Algeria and Niger) and reinforced the local Tuaregs. As a result, secessionist violence against the regime in Mali increased. This led to a military coup and essentially to the splitting of the country into two, a situation that led to the intervention of the French army in order to defeat the extremists and restore stability.

Benjamin Miller analyzed the spread of state failure from one country to another, using images from the world of computers. He compares failed states that are unable to provide basic services or to maintain a monopoly on the use of violence to hardware while the lack of a cohesive and coherent national identity is compared to software. He claims that the combination of hardware and software leads to developments on the following four levels:

1. Local – where a civil war takes place.
2. Regional – the neighbors of a failed state where civil war is taking place are faced with a dilemma of whether or not to intervene in order to prevent the spread of fighting or alternatively the choice of whether or not to exploit an opportunity.
3. Trans-regional – states in the second and third circles of the failed state who must also deal with the effects of its disintegration.
4. International – the international community suffers from the byproducts of the state's failure (terror, refugees, etc.) and is forced to take defensive and preventative measures.³⁰

The growing strength of the Islamic State, for example, is felt on all four levels. It accomplishes this by means of a decentralized network structure through which it activates its allies (Jihadi organizations that operate in various regions, such as Libya, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip and Nigeria) and its infrastructure of volunteers in Europe and North America, among other places. To a large extent, the Islamic State's decentralized network structure rests on the social networks which have become so popular throughout the Middle East. Thus, about 40 percent of the residents of Middle East countries currently have access to the Internet, most of them young people who can be influenced more easily.³¹

²⁸ Fearon, J. and Laitin, D. "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil war," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, 75, <https://goo.gl/fLxUYa>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

²⁹ Rapley, J. "The New Middle Ages," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 3, May/June 2006, 95-103, <https://goo.gl/3ygJ61>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

³⁰ Miller, B. "A presentation given in Peace Operation and State-Building International Initiatives and Local Perspectives and Responses," International Conference, October 31-November 2, 2010, Tel-Aviv University.

³¹ Burrows, M. J. "Middle East 2020: Shaped by or Shaper of Global Trends?" *Atlantic Council*, Washington, August 2014, 6, <https://goo.gl/FmLQja>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

As mentioned, a failed state “invites” the intervention of other states that have identified either a risk or an opportunity. For example, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates have intervened in the civil war in Yemen since they view the growing strength of the Shiite Houthis as a serious threat to their own interests. In contrast, Iran views the civil war in Yemen as a strategic opportunity to strengthen its ally, the Houthis, and to realize its aspirations for regional hegemony by expanding its presence and control of Yemen and the Bab el Mandeb Straits.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S IRRELEVANT RESPONSE

The international community cannot ignore the failed state phenomenon, in view of its direct and indirect effects on the stability of regional and international systems.³² The conventional response of the international community has been to send missions to failed states in order to prevent the “export” of chaos, even though this is never sufficient to accomplish such a goal. In order to get to the root of the problem, failed states need to be rehabilitated. Usually, this requires a complex effort to rebuild a failed state.³³

The reality of the past two decades shows that most of the active conflicts going on today, including international terror, are the result of intrastate conflicts.³⁴ These typically develop in failed states and typically lead to a deterioration of their situation and undermine regional stability and security. In other words, the crises that develop in failed states have a kind of viral effect on their surroundings. The Arab upheaval is a clear example of this: it spread from country to country and from East to West, until it encompassed large parts of the Arab world.

The ability of a state to control its population and its territory in most cases determines the level of violence that the state uses against its citizens and its neighbors. Essentially, there is an inverse relationship in this case between the level of the control and that of violence, as the lower the level of control, the higher the level of violence will be.³⁵ In many cases, failed states “export” their internal crises by directing violence at their neighbors in order to reduce the threat at home (the theory of diversion)³⁶ and react aggressively to international pressure put on them as a result of this pattern of behavior.

In some cases, the opposite pattern is observed: growing international pressure on a failed state pushes it to use greater violence against its population. This pattern of behavior can be seen in Syria and to a much lesser extent in Egypt after the fall of the Moslem Brotherhood from power.

³² Pollack, K. and Walter, B. “Escaping the Civil War Trap in the Middle East,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Issue 38, No. 2, Summer 2015, 43-44, <https://goo.gl/f5jYp5>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

³³ Reilly, D. “The Growing Importance of the Failing State,” <https://goo.gl/BcdJSA>. For further details see: Ayoob, M. *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner, 1995, 13.

³⁴ Coggins, B. L. “Does State Failure Cause Terrorism? An Empirical Analysis 1999-2008,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 58, Issue 2, March 2014, <https://goo.gl/cjVrHb>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

³⁵ Reilly, D. “The Growing Importance of the Failing State,” <https://goo.gl/BcdJSA64>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

³⁶ Groff, B. D., Brun, R. S. and Moore, D. L. “Distraction, attentional conflict, and driveline behavior,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, volume 19, issue 4, July 1983, 359-380, <https://goo.gl/RMBcZS>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

The deterioration of many Arab states towards the status of a failed state as a result of the regional upheaval proves that the most serious threats were never external but rather internal. Opposing the new regimes that tried to establish their legitimacy were mainly domestic opponents. This was the case in, for example, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, the Palestinian Authority and to some extent in Egypt.

The chances of the new regimes to establish themselves despite their many opponents were and still are influenced by a number of factors, including national unity (also in the sense of a shared ethos), political and functional stability of the state's institutions, the state's economic resources and its military power. The combination of all these factors determines how the new regimes respond in order to consolidate their rule. In all the cases we are familiar with in the Middle East, this combination of factors led to greater violence and the intensification of intrastate conflicts. These became an even greater threat to the stability of the new regimes and served as catalysts of regional instability. This reality led David Reilly to his claim regarding the growing effect of intrastate conflicts on the stability of the international community and on the processes of conflict resolution. He based this claim on a number of studies that deal with major intrastate conflicts in various regions of the world.³⁷

As mentioned, the regional upheaval accelerated processes and trends that already existed in North Africa and the Middle East. Almost all of the countries in these regions were weak states to some extent even before 2010. The lack of legitimacy of rulers in these regions was to a large extent the result of their autocratic nature and the incompatibility between their borders, which had been determined by the colonial powers, and the local religious and ethnic identities. Essentially, the same state-to-nation imbalance that Miller wrote about existed in many of the Arab countries.³⁸

As a result of the structural failures and defects described here, it is reasonable to assume that there will not be any major or rapid improvement in the situation of the weak and failed states in the Middle East and North Africa. Furthermore, one can predict that in the short and medium terms instability will spread to additional states and will deepen in states that are already unstable today.³⁹ This trend does not bode well for the region's security and might negatively influence international order.

Since failed states endanger stability and security well beyond their borders and since almost all of the superpowers' past efforts to rehabilitate failed states have failed (the relative success in the Balkans is an exception), the time has come for the superpowers to develop new and efficient strategies through the adoption of more relevant solutions. Thus, for example, instead of clinging to the paradigm of united nation-states, a new paradigm of federated states should perhaps be adopted that will facilitate the expression of religious, tribal and ethnic identities. In Bosnia, this strategy was implemented relatively successfully through the creation of a federation of two autonomous regions: the Serbian region (the Republika Srpska) and the federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina whose population is primarily Bosnian (Moslems) and Croatians (Catholics). These two autonomous entities have only weak ties with one another, which do not require an agreed-upon and shared national ethos. In a similar

³⁷ Reilly, D. "The Growing Importance of the Failing State," <https://goo.gl/BcdJSA64>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

³⁸ Miller, "When and How Regions Become Peaceful," <https://goo.gl/wNzOG068>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

³⁹ Guzansky and Berti. "The Arab Awakening and the 'Cascade' of Failing States," <https://goo.gl/pRpek0>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

manner, ideas have been put forward to establish three autonomous regions in Iraq: Kurdish (which essentially exists already), Sunni and Shiite.

CONCLUSIONS

The regional upheaval, which began six years ago, has left its mark on the Middle East and has entirely changed the logic underlying its structure. The Arab world after six years of upheaval is not in any way similar to what it was previously. Many Arab nation-states, which survived and functioned for years only because they were ruled by autocratic regimes that relied on brutal security apparatuses and on oppression and intimidation, are in an accelerated process of state failure. Several of them are in a process of disintegration and it is reasonable to assume that in the end this trend will lead to their disappearance. They will be replaced by states or other entities that function at various levels of stability and responsibility, which will necessarily influence the stability of the region as a whole.

The escalation of intrastate conflicts into regional confrontations exposes the neighbors of weak and failed states to numerous dangers that can undermine their stability and their security. Thus, for example, we have seen how Saudi Arabia has been affected by the spread of internal conflicts from Yemen; how Mali suffered from the spillover of the civil war in Libya onto its territory; how Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon have had to absorb millions of refugees from Syria; and how Israel is having to deal with terror based in the Sinai Peninsula because Egypt no longer controls most of that territory.

Syria is a prime example of the adverse and large-scale effects that a failed state can have on the region as a whole. The disastrous humanitarian situation in the country has led to a mass exodus of refugees to the neighboring countries. Turkey has absorbed 1.8 million refugees, Lebanon has absorbed 1.1 million and Jordan has absorbed almost one million. Egypt has absorbed about 150 thousand refugees from Syria and Iraq has absorbed about 250 thousand.⁴⁰ The millions of refugees pose not only a huge economic burden but also a difficult demographic problem, particularly in countries that are built on a delicate balance between ethnic groups.⁴¹

Alongside the spillover of intrastate conflicts from failed states, we are witnessing the intervention of external entities within the failed states in order to protect their interests. This includes, for example, Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen against the Houthis-Shiites who are supported by Iran and the dispatch of Iranian forces to Syria in order to assist Assad. This external intervention creates a vicious circle: the intervention escalates the intrastate confrontation and as a result the failed state becomes even weaker, thus "inviting" additional foreign intervention and so on. As a result of this process, the intrastate conflict becomes a regional one and perhaps even an international one and therefore it should be defined as an "interlocked conflict".⁴²

The superpowers that intervene to support one of the sides in an intra-national conflict are usually convinced that they are entering into a patron-client relationship and that they are in full control of the client. However, in some cases this is no more than an illusion and

⁴⁰ The data relate to refugees who are registered with the UN Refugee Agency. For additional information, see <https://goo.gl/VGLiUI>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Kriesberg, L. "Interlocking Conflicts in the Middle East," *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, vol. 3, 1980, 99-119.

we are often witness to cases of "biting the hand that feeds you". This occurs when the client ignores the interests or instructions of his patron and adopts an independent course. In some cases, the client even acts in a manner that is clearly not in the interests of his patron or even acts against him directly. This is what occurred in the case of Saudi Arabia and Turkey which supported ISIS in Syria and Iraq but eventually lost control of the organization and even became the targets of its terrorist attacks.⁴³

According to Michael Hudson's model,⁴⁴ one can gauge the degree of state failure using two variables: the intensity of fragmentation of its national identity and the effectiveness of its central government. If we apply this model in the Middle East, we arrive at the conclusion that Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq and it seems also the Palestinian Authority are failed states (a failed entity in the case of the Palestinian Authority) due to the combination of low effectiveness of the central government and a highly fragmented national/political identity. Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan are in a more stable situation but each of them has a series of unique problems that place them on the axis of state failure, even though they may not technically be failed states.

The 12 CAST indexes, which can be used to measure the degree of state failure,⁴⁵ attribute greater importance to internal indexes (economic, political and public legitimacy) than to external ones (intervention by foreign entities), but it appears that the failure of countries in the Middle East is the result of a complex and problematic combination of both internal and external indexes.

The failed states and those in the process of failure become the setting for intervention by state entities, such as Iran, and not-state entities, such as terrorist and guerilla organizations. The expansion in the activity of external entities is made possible by the weakness of the central government and the rapid expansion of the ungoverned periphery in those countries. At the same time, the expansion in the activity of external entities accelerates processes of state failure. These two interwoven processes eventually lead to the rapid undermining of regional stability, a growing number of refugees, the collapse of the economic system and stronger ties between terror and crime.

The state failure process in the region and the total collapse of some countries into chaos have led to the expansion of ungoverned peripheries. These regions become an incubator for terrorist organizations and non-state actors of various types and serve as their "launch sites" to the rest of the region. This expansion is accomplished by establishing a territorial continuum or by creating a network structure without a geographic continuum (ISIS, for example).

The international community has only a limited ability to intervene in failed states to suppress the violent rebel forces that operate in them, and to support the stabilization of the nation-states and the regional system. These limits are the result of a lack of the political will necessary to intervene in areas of conflict, the conceptual and operational weakness of peacekeeping and state building missions and the understanding that there is a limited lifespan for intervention in these areas. To these factors should be added the problems resulting from competition between the aid organizations and the difficulties in coordinating between

⁴³ Kobi M. and Guzansky, Y. "To Take the Air out of the Qatari Balloon" <https://goo.gl/FMk3PW> (Hebrew)

⁴⁴ Hudson, M. *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*.

⁴⁵ "The Fund for Peace CAST Conflict Assessment Guide," CAST Conflict Assessment Manual, <https://goo.gl/UfRivj>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

the various missions operating in regions of conflict, which reduce the chances of success even further and in many cases may even exacerbate or escalate the situation.⁴⁶

The international community's lack of interest in rehabilitating failed countries is also the result of experience—most of it negative—that has accumulated over the years from such rehabilitation missions. These missions are always very expensive and usually also involve combat and casualties that are not acceptable to public opinion in the West. Thus, public opinion in the West will not tolerate terrorist acts against military forces that have been sent to save lives and to provide assistance, as was the case in Somalia in 1993. As a result, the chaos in the Middle East is expected to continue for many more years and the stable countries in the region, such as Israel, can expect to face additional tests in the future.

Despite the geostrategic changes as a result of the regional upheaval, it would be premature to write off the nation-state. Nation-states which are relatively stable today, such as Egypt, will probably continue to exist in the form familiar to us and perhaps new and stable nation-states will arise, such as a Kurdish state. It is even too early to eulogize Syria and Iraq, since the superpowers may manage to impose various arrangements that will preserve the existing frameworks. In contrast, the chances are slim that Syria and Iraq will manage to return to their former situations, primarily because neither an Iraqi nor Syrian people ever existed; both suffer from deep political fragmentation. Their only chance of surviving is probably within a loose federation in which ethnic and religious minorities enjoy broad autonomy. In order to impose such a model in the Middle East two conditions need to be fulfilled which seems unlikely at the moment: a massive intervention by the superpowers and the destruction of the Islamic State.

There is an additional option, which is to create a large number of states along the ethnic and religious lines on the ruins of today's failed states. These would be relatively small states but more coherent and stable. Thus, for example, Iraq could be split into three states — Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish — and similarly Syria could be split into Alawite, Sunni and Kurdish states.

The Arab world is facing one of its most difficult periods. Up until this point, almost all of the countries that have experienced regime change suffer from one level or another of instability. It is a serious danger and challenge for the regional and international order. It has the potential to drag the entire system to a chaotic and bloody future, but on the other hand it might be an opportunity for a change of the political order and system in a way that will stabilize the region, shaped on an alternative political model, a more suitable one to the local political culture. Only a courageous, determined and unified international leadership would be able to convert the threat to an opportunity. Unfortunately, we are left with the doubt about its existence.

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⁴⁶ Pullman. “The Mercy Industry”; see also Cooke–Dowine. “Rethinking Engagement in Fragile States,” <https://goo.gl/L6a4Na>, Accessed on: 19. December 2016.

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