Rebuilding Failed & Defeated States

Conceptual Issues
- What is a failed state?
  - Rotberg: state that no longer provides “positive political goods” for its citizens (nil capacity)
    - Sovereign territorial state that is no longer sovereign in areas that it claims to rule
      - Claimants to rule fail to exercise clear priority over other groups in territories
  - “State Failure Task Force” now called “Task Force on Political Instability”
    - “State failure is a new label that encompasses a range of severe political conflicts and regime crises exemplified by macro-societal events such as those that occurred in Somalia, Bosnia, Liberia, and Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) in the 1990s

- How do we measure state failure?
  - “Know it when we see it” standard
    - Widespread violence and lawlessness over large parts of its territory?
    - Inability to control borders (e.g., Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Burma)
    - Political goods absent: security, education, healthcare, law & order
  - No clear consensus on the standard
  - Task Force:
    - “Narrowly defined, state failures consist of instances in which central state authority collapses for several years. Fewer than 20 such episodes occurred globally between 1955 and 1998, however—too few for robust statistical analysis”
    - task force used expanded definition: “failure-event”
- Task Force measures
  o set of nearly 1,300 political, demographic, economic, social, and environmental variables for all countries of the world from 1955 to 1998.
  o list of 114 state-failure events that began between 1955 and 1998

What Causes State Failure? (based on Task Force findings)

Task force found “key drivers”:
- Quality of life, that is, the material well-being of a country’s citizens.
- Regime type, that is, the character of a country’s political institutions.
- International influences, including openness to trade, memberships in regional organizations, and violent conflicts in neighboring countries.
- The ethnic or religious composition of country’s population or leadership.

Risk factors that roughly doubled the odds of state “failure-event”:
- Low levels of material well-being, measured by infant mortality rates.
- Low trade openness, measured by imports plus exports as a percent of GDP.
- presence of major civil conflicts in two or more bordering states
Underlying Causes
- alternative patterns of state formation and state building
- Europe experienced at least 800 years of war and civil conflict before consolidating state form
- Much of “developing world” lacks similar experience
- Does war make the state?
- Must state-building be violent?

Focus on Sub-Saharan Africa
- democracies (partial & full) failed more often (5x rate of autocratic regimes)
- low trade openness, ethnic discrimination, new or entrenched leaders, or unbalanced patterns of development caused failure rate 2-5x as high
- unbalanced development (high urbanization with low GDP per capita) makes country 5x more likely to fail

Focus on Muslim Countries
- at least 40% Muslim pop.
- 5x failure rate for partial & full democratic regimes v. autocratic
- smaller effect for other variables (only 50-70% increase)
- three new factors
  o countries with sects 3x more likely to fail
  o countries with extremely high or extremely low religious diversity 3x more likely to fail
  o countries with few IO memberships 2x more likely to fail

Reconstructing Failed States
- post-1945, US occupied mostly developed states
  o administrative structures of state were intact
  o prior democratic experience
- post-1991, most such states never had well developed administrative structure, or state did not have extractive capacity
- Iraq had high capacity for surveillance & repression
  o Did not tax extensively (rentier state)
    ▪ Can federalism produce taxation powers?
- Who should rule until a state is built?
  o No stamina in Somalia
  o Extensive international role in Bosnia & Kosovo