

The new nature of nation state failure by robert i. rotberg

[Experience](#), [Failure](#)



Rotberg starts by defining failed states as “ states that can no longer deliver political goods to their people”. He further states that only a handful of the 191 nation-states can be categorized as failed or collapsed. What encourages failure is generally civil conflict that can be caused by “ ethnic, religious, linguistic, ancestral struggle or other intercommunal enmity”. What further allows this disorder to increase, is the lack of authority of the government. Rotberg talks about the ruler led oppression system where by a nation depends on “ a patrimonial rule and a patronage based system that is one of extraction from ordinary citizens” and lists Zaire and Angola as one of the few nations that have had this type of system. Furthermore, he states that the growth of criminal violence is also another indicator/cause of failure as he relates the authority of the state falls faint and in weakness failed with the criminal oppression of citizens and more clearness in the lawlessness playing out before the citizens with drug trafficking increasing. According to Rotberg, nation states exist to deliver political goods like security, education, health services and economic opportunity etc. However, failed states are unable to honor these obligations and “ increasingly forfeit their function as providers of political goods to warlords and other non-state actors”. He further states that failed states are also not able to provide security and because a failing a state is not to establish an atmosphere of security; the failure of the state becomes obvious even before rebel groups. He also lists other indicators of nation state failure as deteriorating infrastructures and corruption. Rotberg states that a definite sign of a failed state is a declining GDP (Gross Domestic Product) with smaller growth rates on a year to year basis and greater disparities which are seen between the poorer classes

income and those who are in the ruling elite. Inflation rates erupt due to over printing of money by the high officials. He also mentions that smuggling is increasingly common and further states that state failure is complete when the local currency falls out of favor and international currencies replace the currency with money changers on every corner with some of them even being illegal. In a situation where a nation has been affected by total disaster, mayhem over rules the economics with food products becoming scarce and hunger taking over the state thus leading to starvation and citizens are always sent to a position of " endless migration". A failing Gross Domestic Product and monetary unit are not the ones that cause a state to fail because loss of legitimacy can also lead to failure. Rotberg also writes about collapsed states. He defines them " as an extreme version of a failed state". He further states that a collapsed state is a black hole into which a failed polity has fallen and lists Somalia as one of states that has collapsed. Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan are some of the states that Rotberg refers to as this decade's failed states. Rotberg also lists countries such " as Indonesia, Colombia, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe as nation states that have serious elements of failure". He also further states that " state failure is man-made, not merely accidental nor fundamentally caused geographically, environmentally or externally". He mentions presidents like Mobutu of DRC, Eduardo dos Santos of Angola, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe as some of the presidents that have led their countries to the the " precipice" of failure. Rotberg finally talks about preventing state failure and states that strengthening weak states against failure is much easier than reviving them after they have failed or collapsed.

He further mentions that “ reconstruction is very expensive and hardly a smooth process and creating security, recreating bureaucracy, reestablishment of a legitimate system, restarting schools and equipping of hospitals all take time and require large amounts of money”. He also writes that elections need not to be a priority rather constitutions must be written to which a state will abide by and elections must be held to promote and encourage democracy. According to Rotberg, strengthening states prone to failure before they fail is prudent policy and contributes significantly to world order and to minimize refugees and displaced persons. He states that this is far better and less expensive than reconstruction of states after failure.

Although Rotberg has some weaknesses in his writing, I think he wrote a successful argument/article because he uses simple definitions and persuasive examples of his main point in accordance to failed states.

Rotberg’s article does include a few weaknesses. It is true that some of these countries referred to as weak have ethnic disparities and civil strife but I disagree with Rotberg when he says that they encompass failure especially since most of them are able to receive sufficient assistance from outside/developed countries since most of the failed states do not. However, in my opinion, Rotberg’s article is otherwise successfully argued.

Rotberg defines state failure, political goods, contemporary state failure, the hand of man and prevention of state failure by explaining in depth how they are related to bringing down a nation and causing failure. He also breaks it down by using simple examples such as civil wars, loss of authority within the government, growth of criminal violence, failure to deliver political

goods, destroyed infrastructure, corruption, declining levels of GDP and loss of legitimacy as some of the indicators and causes of a failed state. He further explains every point thoroughly and even goes on to ask the question, what exactly does it take to drive a nation into failure or its final collapse and how low does the GDP have to fall and how badly abandoned do the healthcare and educational systems and other political goods have to become?. I find all of the indicators of a failed state by Rotberg clear because given the countries he mentioned, all of the above appear to be present especially with a country like Somalia, where there are constant ongoing civil wars and often “ warlords take over places like in Somali land where chaos prevails and they practice their trade. He further makes an important point by saying that nation state failure is not accidental but rather intentional and accurately states that decision made by the leaders of the state have promptly contributed to the destruction of these nations and continue to weaken them even more which I agree with especially since a lot of corruption runs within such leadership/government. These examples used by Rotberg that define a failed state are compelling and only describe in depth what makes a nation a failure. He also talks about prevention of state failure and uses lengthy and expensive as the call words for a country to be revived after being in a state of failure and collapse.

Unlike failed states, strong and well developed nation states have high technology, a high GDP, a surplus national budget, democracy and a few others are some of the examples that contribute to giving a state its strength. In contrast to failed states, strong states are able to deliver/provide

political goods to its citizens which include security, education, welfare and healthcare. Political scientists also argue that a thriving civil society is good for democracy. A civil society can simply be defined as actions and organization of private citizens around shared goals, interests and values. Failed states need to adapt some of these characteristics including set up of interest groups which are groups in a political system that seek to either alter or maintain the approach of gov't without taking a formal role in elections to help reduce corruption within the government system.