

Fatally Flawed? U.S. Policy Toward Failed States

By Rachel Stohl, Center for Defense Information and Michael Stohl, Purdue University

THE EVENTS OF SEPT. 11 may prove, as so many have claimed in their immediate aftermath, to be a true watershed in international relations and for the lives of American citizens. However, there can be no doubt that the events changed the priorities of U.S. President George W. Bush, and challenged the approach to international relations that characterized the first nine months of the new administration. To that end, the current security environment will have significant impacts on the persisting problem of failed and failing states.

Why should the Bush administration even care about failed states, now that the United States has been confronted with new security challenges? As the United States prepares for a new "war," the problems of weak, failing and failed states persist. Failing states represent the ultimate disintegrative force — the inability of the state to provide for the needs of its citizens. From an international security standpoint, such states often threaten their neighbors and regions, not as classic military enemies but rather as the source of instability. Through the refugees they foster, the spillover of ethnic, religious or ideological conflicts, the potential for the spread of disease, and the potential to overwhelm the capacity of their neighbors to care for the disasters they spawn, weak and failing states present both security and foreign policy challenges. In the context of current events, Afghanistan is an all too graphic ex-

ample of a failed state whose internal situation has dramatically confronted the rest of the world.

Although the entire security framework has been altered since Sept. 11, the first year of the George W. Bush presidency witnessed pronounced differences in both declaratory and actual U.S. foreign policy. In the beginning, the administration indicated their intention to focus on the issues surround-

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ing nuclear weapons and missile shields and their impact on relations with Russia, China, and Europe. A clear intention to distance themselves from the previous administration's declaratory multilateralism dominated the Bush team's initial foreign policy agenda. In these first nine months, the Bush administration caused worry within the councils of its closest allies in Europe and Asia, and concern around the world, by stated intentions to abandon treaties, decline participa-

tion in multilateral discussions, thwart the development of new accords, and fail to follow through on previous U.S. commitments. The administration also made clear its intention to adopt a more "hands-off" attitude to potential problems and crises in the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans.

The president and his foreign policy team, through the decision to abandon further consideration of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, disengagement from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and their disinterest in all things multilateral, gained a reputation amongst friends and foes as arrogant unilateralists. The concern of this paper is how the Bush team's perspective ultimately will define a policy vis-a-vis failed states and the problems such states pose.

The concept of the failed state is not a new one, but in the last 10 years the breakdown of states and the gross failures of state governments have received more attention. Vice President Al Gore established the State Failure Task Force in 1994, consisting of a group of distinguished academics in consultation with government agencies, to analyze factors that can severely weaken or cause states to fail, and to develop possible joint actions to address these factors. In April 2000, the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, known as the Hart-

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Rudman Commission after its co-chairs, former U.S. Senators Gary Hart and Warren Rudman, issued a report outlining the six key U.S. national security objectives for the first quarter of the 21st century. Analyzing the impact of globalization and the emerging security paradigms that resulted from the end of the Cold War, the Hart-Rudman Commission identified failed and weak states as specific challenges the United States will face with increasing regularity in the next 25 years. Failed states will thus require

attention from the Bush administration — whether to act or disregard, whether to intervene militarily or with development assistance, or whether to involve U.S. allies or act unilaterally.

The Clinton Approach

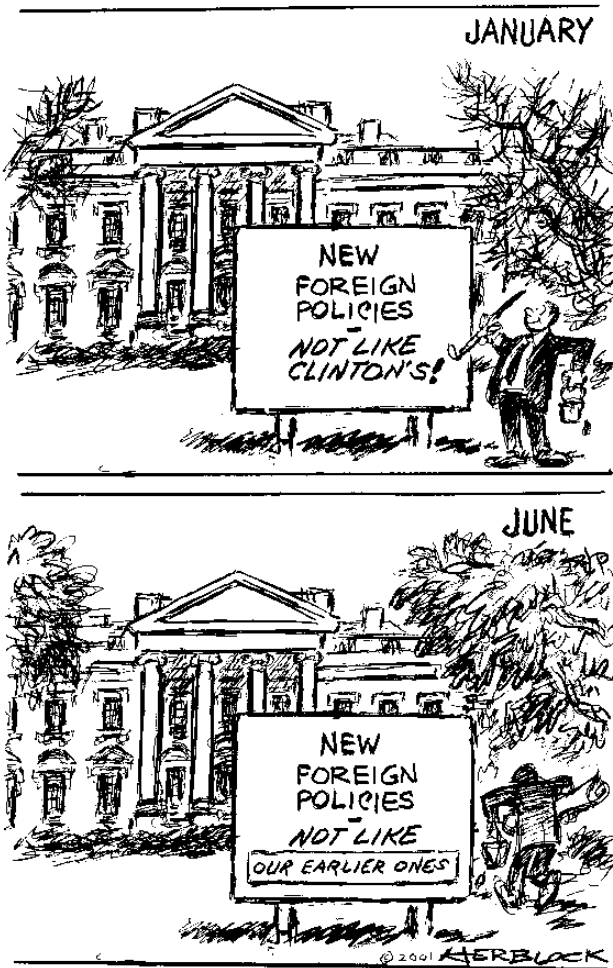
The Bush administration started its tenure trying to differentiate itself from that of President Bill Clinton. During Clinton's eight year term, the United States developed a policy approach vis-à-vis failed or failing states that had three component parts: attack the root causes of conflict within fragile states; promote collective security with respect to responses to needs; and engage in preventive diplomacy.

The root-causes approach led to policies that stressed open markets and the development of economic links, the promotion of democracy and human rights, the development of infrastructures, and the strengthening of government to enable states to resolve their own conflicts. The promotion of collective security relied on the United Nations, and then NATO, for a more multilateral rather than unilateral approach. It stressed collective responsibility and burden sharing (often more so than collective decision-making). However, many interventions were carried

out on U.S. terms, much to the annoyance of U.S. allies, including aspects of the interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Engaging in preventive diplomacy involved employing roving ambassadors, and focused on arms control and arms transfers as well as human rights. The administration enacted a more vocal condemnatory policy toward repressive regimes, but refused to condemn repressive governments deemed to be economically or strategically important for U.S. interests.

The Clinton administration remained conflicted in implementing some of these approaches throughout the presidency. In 1995, for example, the Clinton administration added domestic economic considerations to the list of criteria for approving weapons exports, and opposed efforts to create a "Code of Conduct," based on criteria such as human rights, governing countries eligible to receive U.S. weapons. Even when the U.S. wasn't selling weapons, military know-how trained foreign militaries and peacekeepers, often as a substitute for involving U.S. troops in unilateral, multilateral, and international initiatives. The Clinton administration was also never able to move beyond the parameters and assumptions of the Weinberger-Powell doctrine that outlines conditions for the when and the how of military deployment. This strategic approach discouraged the use of the U.S. military except in the most favorable strategic, operational, and domestic political circumstances, and established the fear of American casualties and the need for overwhelming force as the two key legs of military policy. This policy lessened the chances of U.S. military intervention,

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and, when intervention was chosen, delayed the possibility until much later in the development of crises, when the requirements are by necessity much larger, as was the case in Kosovo. The Weinberger-Powell principle also prevented the development of an appropriate force structure for dealing with the threats posed by failed states.

The Bush Vision

The Bush administration has tried to demonstrate fundamentally different operating principles, purposes and goals. During the campaign and since taking office, Bush and his advisers have criticized the multilateral approach. While saying very little about failed states during the campaign, Bush did indicate that he did not believe that events in Africa concerned the U.S. national interest, and that he did not believe “nation-building” was a proper role for the U.S. military. During the presidential debates with Gore, Bush indicated that he would not have engaged in “nation building” in Haiti, intervened in Rwanda to prevent genocide, or become involved in the Balkans. But, he did approve of the Australian intervention in Timor (because it was an initiative requiring only U.S. logistical and technical support).

The Bush team has stated the importance of the economy as a factor in U.S. policy. Both Bush and his national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, have indicated that they believe that the United States needs to encourage the integration into the world market of the less developed nations of the world, because otherwise the global

South is of minimal importance to U.S. national interests.

The Bush approach has not been met enthusiastically by U.S. allies and is indeed in contrast to some U.S. strategic planning. The CIA’s “Worldwide Threat 2001: National Security in a Changing World” (delivered by George Tenet, Director of Central Intelligence, Feb. 7, 2001), stressed a major concern for U.S. security to address “the growing ... potential for state fragmentation and failure.” The CIA’s position reflects the Hart-

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Rudman Commission’s recommendation that the United States establish priorities for aiding weak and failing states, and translates into selective rankings of nations that should be assisted. The commission pointed to four in particular — Mexico, Colombia, Russia, and Saudi Arabia — whose stability is of “major importance to U.S. interests.” For failing states of lesser U.S. interest, the Hart-Rudman Commission suggests the United States “work with the international community to develop innovative mechanisms to manage the problem of failed states.”

Responding to Failed States

But how should the United States respond to the threat of failing states?

In addressing the weak and failing state, the Hart-Rudman Commission argues that preventive diplomacy should be the first reaction for the United States and its allies, including the use of political and economic initiatives. However, if preventive diplomacy fails, the commission stresses that the United States “should be prepared to act militarily in conjunction with other nations in situations characterized by the following criteria: when U.S. allies or friends are imperiled; when the prospect of weapons of mass destruction portends significant harm to civilian populations; when access to resources critical to the global economic system is imperiled; when a regime has demonstrated intent to do serious harm to U.S. interests; and when genocide is occurring.” The commission contends that just one of these factors may be enough to justify military intervention.

While the Bush administration has derided military intervention (not in all cases a negative for peace considerations), it seems quite content to continue promoting U.S. arms exports and training. While arms exports clearly have strong financial benefits to key actors in the American economy and strong political backing within the Congress, many of these arms exports also may extract a toll in contributing to further instability and declining abilities elsewhere. In response to the Sept. 11 attacks, the Bush administration initially expressed a willingness to provide weapons to countries that have been ineligible to receive U.S. weapons because of persistent human rights violations, lack of democracy, and even support of terrorism (although now the administration is only pushing an exception for India and Pakistan).

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Immediate Challenges for U.S. Policy Toward Failed States

Compiled by Matthew Lewis, Research Assistant

MACEDONIA

The stakes: More rights for Macedonia's Albanians; Litmus test for U.S. leadership in Europe; Danger to spread into a wider war.

Warring Parties:

- 1 National Liberation Army (NLA) (Albanian Rebels)
- 2 Macedonian government

Victim numbers and who: 150,000 displaced (ethnic Albanian and Macedonian).¹

Costs: Thousands of homes and infrastructure destroyed. Renewed polarization of tension between ethnic-Albanians and non-ethnic Albanians throughout the Balkans.

Years of conflict: Since February 2001.

SUDAN

The stakes: Oil and religious freedoms; Major humanitarian crisis; domestic constituencies for Bush Administration to please.

Warring Parties:²

- 1 Sudanese Government; National Islamic Front (NIF)
- 2 Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)
- 3 Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) (Political wing of the SPLA)
- 4 Sudan People's Democratic Front (SPDF)
- 5 National Democratic Alliance (NDA)

Victim numbers and who: 2 million dead from violence and hunger; 4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs);³ 465,000 refugees.⁴

Costs: Non-existence of development, particularly in south, endemic poverty and famine; use of natural resources (oil) to fund conflict.

Years of conflict: Since 1983.

COLOMBIA

The stakes: Drug trafficking by resistance groups replaces historical issues of agrarian reform, unequal distribution of wealth and social injustice; U.S. efforts to eliminate the principal global supplier of drugs and internationalize the war on drugs; the threat of an expanding regional war.

Warring Parties:

- 1 Colombian government and paramilitaries with assistance from U.S. "Plan Colombia"
- 2 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)
- 3 Army of National Liberation (ELN)
- 4 Various other right-wing paramilitary groups

Victim numbers and who: Estimated 40,000 dead in the fighting since mid-1980s. 1.9 million displaced persons⁵, 700,000 of which are children, thousands of kidnap victims whose ransoms fund the ongoing conflict.

Costs:

- Plan Colombia costs \$7.5 billion overall, the Colombian government is scheduled to pay \$4 billion, the U.S. \$1.3 billion. The remaining \$2.2 billion is supposed to come from international donors. Of the \$1.3 billion in U.S. aid, 80% goes to military and police.
- The Andean Regional Initiative (ARI) costs the U.S. \$1 billion this year
- Undetermined environmental damage from spraying to destroy crops
- Unemployment rate 22%
- Millions lost in oil development due to terrorist activities
- Proliferation of thousands of landmines throughout the country⁶
- Widespread violence and conflict

Years of conflict: Civil conflict since 1964.⁷

1 International Crisis Working Group, July 27, 2001, Paper "Macedonia: Still Standing"

2 State Department Report on Human Rights, Sudan, 2000.

3 State Department Report on Human Rights, Sudan, 2000.

4 U.S. Committee for Refugees, <http://www.refugees.org/news/crisis/sudan.htm>

5 Plan Colombia, A Closer Look, from Colombia Report website: <http://www.colombiareport.org/plancolombia.htm>

6 San Francisco Chronicle, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/chronicle/archive/2001/08/12/MN216965.DTL>

7 Ibid.

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If the Bush administration does, in the end, make a decision to intervene in the context of a “failing or failed” state, it will have to solve the problems of how and with whom. One example is the “grand coalition” put together in 1991 to fight the Gulf War by the first Bush administration - in which Powell, current Vice President Dick Cheney and Rice all played an active role. The U.S. effort to now build a global coalition against terrorism may aid in efforts towards failing states as well.

If the United States chooses to intervene militarily, the U.S. military must spend time and resources preparing and planning for involvement in such conflicts. If there is no militarily intervention, but rather the provision of development or humanitarian assistance, the United States must allocate resources. The United States may choose to ignore the incident altogether, but this might require an explanation of inaction to the international community. All of these scenarios play directly into the current debate on U.S. foreign policy priorities, and have specific implications for U.S. military force structure and the determination of Defense Department strategies.

The new focus of U.S. foreign policy — to stamp out terror networks — will occur in some of these weak states. Beyond the global “war” against terrorism, the Bush administration will also be tested in three places not central to the current search for terrorists: Macedonia, Sudan and Colombia. These three conflicts are just examples out of the 39 conflicts that were ongoing when Bush took office at the beginning of 2001, but can be used to

extrapolate a U.S. reaction to similar significant situations: Macedonia represents a challenge to the U.S. vision of Europe, Colombia turns a foreign civil war into a domestic concern (drugs), and Sudan is a major humanitarian crisis.

Macedonia

Macedonia, and the greater Balkans situation in general, is key in gauging U.S. responses to the problem of three very different geographically located and politically important failing states. For months, Macedonian militants (local Albanian minorities, as well as ethnic Albanians from Kosovo) attacked Macedonian police and military outposts demanding more rights for Macedonia’s Albanians. The initial U.S. reaction was slow, and *The Economist* reported that “European allies are losing their patience with the lack of American involvement (March 26, 2001)” and “No senior American official has been to Skopje. This is the first time since the wars of the Yugoslav succession began that a big Balkan initiative has had no serious American involvement” (March 29, 2001). Soon after, however, the Americans did in fact intervene by escorting hundreds of armed Albanians from the village of Aracinovo that was besieged by Macedonian government forces.

During the conflict in Macedonia, the region saw an influx of weapons from neighboring Kosovo, Albania, and other regional sources, which allowed rebels to easily acquire weapons for use in their insurgency. NATO’s mission, Task Force Harvest, was intended to help disarm the Albanian militants in a framework of a country-wide cease fire. The Macedonian government also re-

quested assistance from the United States to destroy the country’s seized and collected small arms and light weapons.

It is far too early to tell how effective NATO’s efforts in Macedonia will be, as Task Force Harvest ended Sept. 26. However, if the agreements brokered by the international community stabilize the country, Macedonia could serve as a good example of international intervention propping up a state that was spiraling out of control. The British-led NATO mission addressed Macedonia’s surplus weapons problem, receiving more than 3,000 weapons from Albanian militants, ranging from tanks to RPGs and other small arms. (This total is nowhere near the estimated holdings, but has strong symbolic value, in that it buttressed the militants’ decision to suspend hostilities.) In exchange for the weapons, the Macedonian government, controlled by ethnic Macedonian parties, agreed to grant more rights to the Albanian minority. To date there have been no hostilities except for minor skirmishes since NATO entered the country. NATO has now deployed a follow-on force with a limited three-month mandate, commanded by the Germans, to guard the civilian monitors supervising the implementation of the agreement. The United States will remain involved through NATO forces, but Washington has announced that the U.S. role will be limited in the Balkans due to the need for U.S. forces elsewhere. U.S. initial reluctance to engage, and the Bush team’s distancing in general, did create great concern within Europe, however, about the new administration’s intentions with respect to the future of NATO and the U.S. role in “Europe.”

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Even if the flames in Macedonia are extinguished, the entire region will remain a trouble spot for the United States. In Kosovo, violent incidents between the Serbs and Albanians have marred NATO's peacekeeping mission from its inception. Bosnia remains divided into three antagonistic regions along ethnic and religious lines (Bosnia's prime minister stepped down in June, 2001, frustrated with the parliament's inability to develop election law). And finally, Macedonia's problems are far from over. The country suffers from devastation of the economy, corruption of the political system, and massive proliferation of international actors and militaries who are undertaking legal and illicit activities throughout the country. These factors should keep the United States engaged in the region for a long time to come.

Sudan

In Sudan, conflicts over oil and religion have resulted in one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Continued fighting in Sudan also has the potential to destabilize the region as a whole. Although distant on every front — politically, economically and geographically — Sudan plays a significant role in U.S. foreign policy determinations through the recently announced Powell Initiative on Africa to combat AIDS through prevention and treatment.

Sudan, like other war-torn countries in Africa, has easy access to weapons through porous borders and massive proliferation of small arms on the continent as a whole. Human Rights Watch reports that Sudanese government forces receive major conven-

tional weapons as well from China, Iran, Iraq, the Russian Federation, former Soviet Republics and former Warsaw Pact states. Some of these countries sold weapons in exchange for loans to be paid by future oil exports. Weapons from regional conflicts in Uganda, Congo and Ethiopia and Eritrea also have made their way to Sudan's fighting factions.

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The Clinton administration's policy on Sudan was "to isolate the government of Sudan; to counter the threat it poses to the United States, its neighbors, and its own people; and to press for fundamental change in its policies" (Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Hill Summit on Sudan, Nov. 9, 1999). The United States has listed Sudan amongst its list of terrorist sponsors since 1993, and, since 1997, Sudan has been under a strict embargo. The United States does not sell weapons to Sudan, nor does it purchase Sudanese oil.

However, the *New York Times* reported this summer that the Bush administration can't ignore Sudan any longer because "it involves two of its most important domestic constituencies: oil interests and religion" (June 17, 2001). The Bush administration has been under pressure from Evangelical Christians furious with the past two-decade's policy towards the catastrophic human suffering, particularly

in the "Christian" south of Sudan. They are pressuring Bush to increase the food aid program to Sudan (currently the U.S. provides minimal food aid to southern Sudan) and to support faith based charities. In addition, given the administration's connections to the international oil industry, they are also pressuring Bush to push for an end to oil operations that might assist the regime in Khartoum.

U.S. oil companies that have watched foreign companies (as well as the Sudanese government) get rich off the oil fields in Sudan want a resolution to the conflict there as soon as possible in order to get a piece of the action. The U.S. involvement in Sudan is a complex one and one that will not only demonstrate the U.S. commitment to Africa, but will also gauge what interests need to be at stake for some kind of U.S. action in a failed state. On Sept. 6, the Bush administration appointed former Sen. John C. Danforth as a special envoy to Sudan, tasked with seeking peace in Sudan. What resources in the form of carrots and sticks Danforth can bring to the warring parties is still unclear.

Colombia

The continuing war in Colombia is in danger of destabilizing five neighboring states as it spills over these countries' borders. The conflict also represents the internationalization of the drug war — in terms of trafficking, consumption, and production. Former U.S. ambassador to Colombia, Morris Busby, said, "[it] is one of the most serious foreign policy problems that we have. It's almost like China, where you had warlords fighting with each other, and a weak central government. It's a terrible situation."

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The negative impacts of the conflict in Colombia could spread throughout the region. Recently, peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have stalled, and right-wing paramilitaries, often also linked to drugs, have become the fastest-growing military force in Colombia. The *Economist* reports that “neighboring countries worry that Plan Colombia will push refugees, violence and drugs into their countries. That is already happening in Ecuador, which is economically and politically fragile” (Feb. 1, 2001).

Bush inherited the Clinton administration’s “Plan Colombia,” a \$1.3 billion aid program. The package includes: high-tech weapons; military training; alternative economic development, such as crop substitution programs for opium poppies and aid for local farmers; strengthening the judicial system; and aiding displaced refugees. Critics of the program maintain that it focuses too much on the law enforcement approach in dealing with the drug trade, and not enough on developing and rebuilding Colombia’s infrastructure. The Bush administration has proposed the Andean Regional Initiative (ARI) to address critiques of the original “Plan Colombia.” According to James Mack, deputy assistant secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “ARI addresses the three issues that lie at the heart of the challenges facing the region: democracy, development, and drugs. ARI balances the need to address the continuing challenges in Colombia with the competing priority of working with the rest of the region to prevent a further spreading of Colombia’s problems or backsliding in areas where progress already has been

made.” ARI puts just under a billion dollars of U.S. support into the region. Slightly more than three-quarters of a billion of this money is to support the Andean Counter-Drug Initiative, run by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. Money will go towards programs in all of the affected countries in the region, and approximately half of the counter-drug budget will go to support development and democratic institution support programs, according to Mack.

ARI has been criticized for focusing too heavily on the military at the expense of economic and civil development and continuing a counter-drug approach that has been thus far ineffective.

Violence and crime are rampant throughout Colombia. The country is already awash in small arms, and new weapons will be shipped as part of “Plan Colombia.” While the effects of Colombia’s instability are felt throughout the country, and amongst the entire population, children suffer enormously in this conflict. Of the 1.5 million displaced persons in Colombia, 700,000 are children, and, in 2000, some 14,000 children were estimated to have been serving for the various armed forces fighting there (since November 1999, the Colombian government has prohibited under 18s from serving in official government forces).

U.S. leaders have justified the major military investment in Colombia by arguing that eliminating drug kingpins and reducing the threat of guerrilla forces are important to the long-term stability of Colombia, and the reduction in the amount of drugs entering the United States. A senior Colombian official has observed that “drug production feeds all the violence in Colombia, creates the economic problems, hurts the people, and

creates problems of human rights.” The Bush administration will have to decide if it should continue to back a primarily military solution to the drug problem, and if it is willing to disengage if a more severe crisis of state should develop. The Bush administration has appeared to take Colombia seriously, as Powell was intending to visit Colombia on the day of the Sept. 11 attacks. How the United States now chooses to respond to Colombia will also serve as an indicator of how the United States is going to deal with fragility in its own hemisphere.

Conclusion

The international security framework changed on Sept. 11. As the Bush administration prepares for a protracted “war” against terrorism, many of the components of such an effort are part of the same model needed to address weak and failing states. The United States will be looking for a long-term mission, working with an international coalition, and seeking to address the root causes of terrorism. Before Sept. 11, the Bush administration had rejected most of these concepts of intervention, concepts that now have become necessary to wage the fight against terrorism. Many of these same principles should be applied to a policy that appropriately addresses weak and failing states. ■

Based on the paper “The Failed and Failing State and the Bush Administration: Paradoxes and Perils” prepared for the workshop on Failed and Failing States, April 10-14, 2001, Firenze, Italy.

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