



Metis

Study

***Fragile, failed and quasi states –
who are we dealing with?***

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**Institute for
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Summary

State fragility in Africa affects the security of Europe and Germany. State failure, weak state institutions and transnational and ethnic conflicts are all causing migration and are factors

conducive to radicalisation and international terrorism. Identifying and cooperating with reliable state, international and non-governmental partners in the region are thus long-term measures of conflict prevention.

State Fragility: An Introduction

The modern concept of state is a product of European history after the Peace of Westphalia treaties, of nationalism after the French Revolution and of the Western world order based on international law. In the classical sense according to Georg Jellinek, states are characterised by the three elements of state population, state territory and state authority. According to a more modern view, recognition of the state by other states and membership in international organisations are also important elements of statehood. The provision of public goods and services by a state's institutions to its citizens is considered a sign of functioning structures of public order and administration. State-like organisations that have a state population, a state territory and the monopoly of the legitimate use of force but lack international recognition as a legitimate state are called *de facto* regimes. Examples include Northern Cyprus, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic/Republic of Artsakh and Transnistria. Palestine and Kurdistan are examples of state-like entities with a defined state population but only limited state authority and partly disputed state territory.

If one or more of the elements that characterise a state is lacking, this is called state failure or fragile statehood in states that already exist, and state formation in ones just coming into existence. According to OECD definitions, a state is already considered fragile when one of the key aspects of modern Western statehood is significantly weakened. The designations failing, failed and fragile states are thus shaped by a concept of state that assumes the existence of functioning nation states as the standard or ideal. A "Western bias" is apparent in this

ideal, setting the European canon of values, rights, and good governance as the standard for what constitutes functioning statehood. From an analytic point of view, the threshold for statehood in the OECD ideal is thus relatively high.

The number of states worldwide has nearly quadrupled over the last 100 years. While there were 55 states before 1914, this number increased to 69 after the European multinational states disintegrated over the course of the two World Wars. As a result of the decolonisation process that began in the 1960s and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990/1991, the number of states further increased to 194 states today. New states developed in Africa and Asia in particular. Due to their formation along colonial borders, they never went through the sovereignty formation process that had such a strong influence on European states. Therefore, a large number of "artificial" states came into existence.

They lacked ethnic, cultural and religious homogeneity, gradually increasing sovereignty and a historical founding myth. The legitimacy of the ruling elite was furthermore often only based on military power and control over the capital city. Peace and conflict research has shown such young and unstable states to contribute to the development of more armed conflicts and civil wars. The reason is that every state undergoes a phase of violence in its formation. As Charles Tilly put it: "war made the state and the state made war". Peaceful revolutions in which a state forms without bloodshed are an exception to this rule. Examples of peaceful political secession would be Czechoslovakia splitting into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and Montenegro seceding from the rest



of Yugoslavia. In this context, however, it is important to note a counterintuitive peculiarity. Although the number of states have tripled and the total number of armed conflicts has increased, there have been more intrastate conflicts and civil wars than interstate conflicts.

capital¹ and the people’s trust in the government, thus impeding reform. This makes escaping from the vicious circle of endogenous causes of disintegration more difficult.

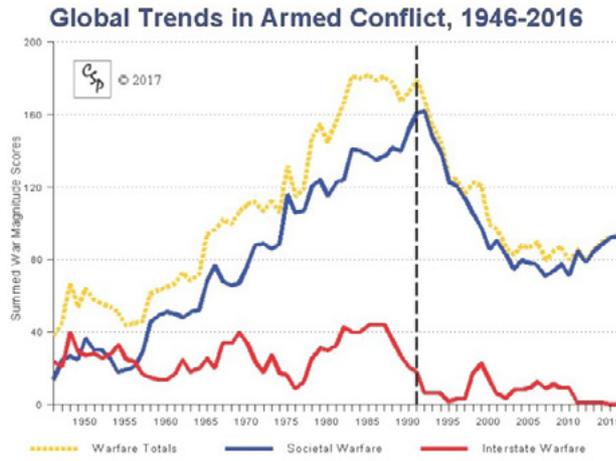


Figure 1 Interstate and intrastate wars since 1946 (Center for Systemic Peace)

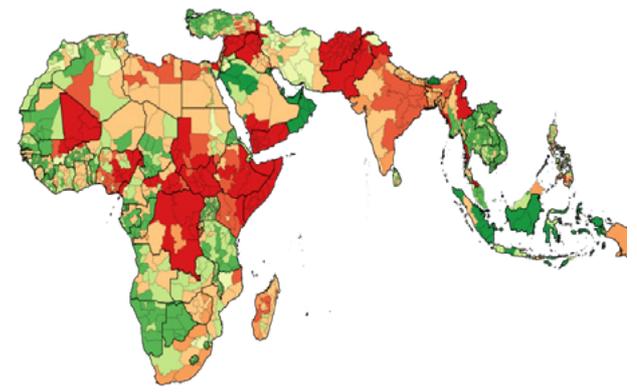


Figure 2 Political instability at a sub-state level in Africa and the Middle East in 2017 (own illustration based on ACLED)²

We can thus conclude that state fragility is not a new phenomenon. It has, however, become more virulent as a result of the formation of many unstable new states since 1945.

State Fragility and State Stability in Africa

The 2017 Fragile States Index of the Fund for Peace lists 14 African nations among the 20 most unstable states, with South Sudan, Somalia and the Central African Republic as the top three. These 14 nations are all Sub-Saharan states. The majority of them are artificial – their borders are a relic of the colonial rule by major European powers. With the exception of Libya, state fragility is more widespread south of the Sahara than in the north of Africa.

Mali, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia are all states showing signs of failing. There are many more states that are currently failing, albeit to a lesser degree. The causes of state fragility can be analysed at different levels.

Endogenous factors include internal problems of a state such as poverty, corruption and kleptocracy. The state institutions of developing countries are usually weak and the associated economic weakness and susceptibility to corruption are detrimental to public education and social services. Governments exercise control mostly through their strong security apparatuses. Sclerotic states are breeding grounds for organised violence below the threshold of war, which in turn undermines the social

Exogenous factors – those that influence weak state structures from the outside – in Africa still include a lack of food security and very high levels of malnutrition. Since the primary (agriculture) and secondary sector (raw materials industry) make up a large part of an economy that is barely diversified, the state has very little in the way of resilience in the face of fluctuating world market prices, turmoil on the financial markets or crop failures due to environmental influences. The tertiary sector of the service industry is still under development in Africa. It cannot yet absorb external economic and financial shocks. The fragility of neighbouring states further has a transnational negative influence on more stable states. As a result, even long-established economic or political stabilisation efforts are sometimes undone by external crises because of inherent weakness.

Last but not least, *structural factors* are also a cause of state fragility. Sixteen of the 55 African states are landlocked and without direct access to the oceans and thus the world market. It is exactly those states that rank last on the Human Development Index. Landlocked states are faced with high transit costs due to their distance

¹ In societies with little social capital, executive power to protect property and enforce the law or state regulations is more important, since there is not enough trust and willingness to cooperate to be able to solve problems and conflicts.

² ACLED: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.



from transshipment ports and a lack of infrastructure. Dependence on the goodwill of neighbouring states as well as rudimentary economic agreements and customs regulations are further obstacles. In addition to these geographical factors, there are also climatic conditions, such as a lack of arable land, water scarcity and desertification, which also pose almost insurmountable challenges for weak states.

Success stories do exist, however. Economic development on the African continent has for some years been characterised by high growth rates. A middle class is forming for the first time in many states. This in turn strengthens democratisation efforts in some states. Seven out of 55 African states are currently considered young, consolidating democracies. Another factor is the increasing digitalisation and technologisation of Africa, even in regions where poverty is rampant. In 18 states where over 75% of the population do not have secure access to electricity, around 30–40% of people are already using mobile phones, for example. Regions of relative stability with hardly any internal violent conflicts are also emerging. The number of successful military coups has also decreased, from 88 between 1952 and 1989 to around 25 between 1990 and 2018.

Security-Political Implications for Europe and Germany

At present, the perception of political instability in Africa and its consequences for Europe and Germany is dominated by discussions surrounding illegal migration. With the population of Africa predicted to almost double, from 1.3 billion people today to 2.3 billion by 2050, the number of people fleeing from war and economic hardship is also expected to rise. Considering that an estimated 3 million refugees are already waiting on the North African coast for passage to Europe, this seems plausible.

Migration is primarily a humanitarian problem, however, and only indirectly one of security policy. That changes if violent radicals immigrate to Europe or if refugees bring ethnical, religious, political or ideological conflicts with them from their home countries to their new homes. The funding of organised crime through human trafficking and smuggling, which are closely linked with terrorist organisations and the illegal arms trade, has direct implications for security. Terrorism and radicalisation are thus direct risks affecting Europe.

Due to the weakness of the states in the region, the Sahel in particular offers extremist groups space to organise, retreat and train. For some time now, terrorism experts have been calling the region between Mauritania and Somalia a possible future sanctuary.

Any discussion of state fragility must also take into account low levels of resilience against epidemics and pandemics. In a globalised world, weak state structures are conducive to the rapid transnational spread of

diseases, as became apparent during the most recent outbreak of Ebola.

Bundeswehr contributions to dealing with state fragility in Africa

Germany is increasingly involved in security and development policy efforts in Africa. This is a result of Europe realising that it must do more to support its neighbouring continent to the south. For Germany, its Federal Government Policy Guidelines for Africa are most important in this respect. The focus of these guidelines is an interministerial, networked and coordinated course of action. Every ministry further has its own strategies in its respective area of expertise. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research, for example, pursues its “Africa Strategy 2014–2018”, while the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development is currently drawing up a “Marshall Plan with Africa”. There are also activities at EU and UN level. Germany focuses on regional integration, fighting poverty, hunger and corruption, and building constitutional structures. Incentives for economic growth and trade, scientific and cultural cooperation as well as environmental protection are also created. The Bundeswehr focuses its contributions mainly on strengthening the African peace and security architecture. This involves certain tasks such as equipment aid, advisory tasks, enabling and enhancing as well as providing training for security forces in partner states. The objective is to enable African states to develop better crisis management capabilities. The focus of these efforts is on improving African capacities for rapid response operations (African Standby Force), promoting maritime capabilities to deal with piracy, and combatting the proliferation of small arms.

A pragmatic strategy for dealing with state fragility

What the Western world considers fragility is often what normality looks like for the rest of the world. The various levels of state fragility must therefore be properly differentiated and precisely assessed. The “Federal Government Policy Guidelines” for Africa provide a suitable framework that needs to be further tailored to individual countries and regions. That includes greater differentiation between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. A networked approach is needed in order to address the endogenous, exogenous and structural causes of fragility previously outlined. The Bundeswehr can provide support primarily to address the endogenous factors.

Firstly, the Bundeswehr should focus on young, consolidating democracies such as Tunisia, Senegal, Ghana, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and South Africa. Increased support for these states can encourage their democratic development, which may then spread to other states. As a next step, these “islands of stability” could be used as a base from which to provide neighbouring states



with support in the area of security policy by democratising and civilising their armed forces, police forces and judiciary systems.

Secondly, the Bundeswehr should focus its efforts on the largest military forces of the more stable states, since they will play a key role in African Union peacekeeping missions on the continent. Examples of such states include Angola, Ethiopia, Burundi, Nigeria, Cameroon and Tanzania.

Thirdly, Germany should use existing networks to establish a sustainable peace order together with the former colonial powers of the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Portugal, Belgium and Spain.

Fourthly, this may also mean considering a European response force for Africa, which would support national and international actors in crisis situations. In this context, Europe might also establish bases on its neighbouring continent that would act as anchors of stability.

Finally, any cooperation with national partners and regional organisations that is already successful should be further intensified in order to gradually enable African states to independently meet such challenges in specific spheres of policy (such as maritime security).

Proposals for an Africa strategy

National conference on Africa

- The relevant ministries should more actively coordinate their initiatives in Africa by regularly meeting in an expert forum.
- National and international experts on Africa from science, industry and politics, partners in international organisations and NGOs should become regular members of such a forum.

Whole-of-Nation approach

- A cluster of excellence on Africa involving relevant ministries and civilian actors should be established.
- This cluster should provide a forum for companies and NGOs active or planning to be active in Africa. This

would allow civilian initiatives to be better coordinated with state initiatives.

- German companies operating in Africa would also be able to share their experience. The cluster would also serve as a coordination platform for chambers of commerce.

Bilateral initiatives of the Bundeswehr

- Training missions with key partners should be established to be sustainable and maintained for at least a decade.
- Maritime capabilities should be further strengthened (as already done in the Gulf of Guinea) through training, transfer of technology, donation of patrol boats and maritime operational picture systems.
- Setting up more bases in strategically important regions (in West Africa and South-East Africa) should also be considered with EU partner nations. Such bases would serve as operating bases for training missions and technical support.

Proposals for international initiatives

- The establishment of a European response force for Africa in times of crisis should be further discussed in the context of permanent structured cooperation. This should not be a purely military endeavour. Instead, a mechanism that covers the whole spectrum of crisis management (humanitarian emergencies, pandemics, natural disasters and peacekeeping) would make more sense.
- Cooperation with the African Union, in particular with the regional organisations ECOWAS, EAC and SADC should be intensified. The advantage of concentrating efforts at a regional level is that the individual challenges in each region can be targeted specifically. 

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