Failed States and Failed Theories:

the (Re)Securization of Underdevelopment

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What has collapsed is more the vision (or dream) of the progressive developmental state that sustained generations of academics, activists and policymakers, than any real existing state.

The term ‘failed state’ and the related jargon has come to the fore in the last two decades both in the academic and in the policy-making fora. Given its diffusion, it is noteworthy analysing such a term and the implications it bears. After a short introduction in which the term is inserted in its historical and cultural background, the theoretical approaches related to this field of studies are taken into consideration. Then, the most diffused stream of studies, the one which is more interconnected with policy-makers, is analysed in order to uncover the factors which led to its creation. This paper calls into question the analytical validity of the term failed state as it has been used by the aforementioned stream of though, arguing that its creation was inextricably related to a phenomenon typical of the beginning and the end of the Cold War: the securization of underdevelopment. Accordingly, the concept of failed state is analysed as a discursive construction rather than an analytical tool investigating thus the mechanisms whereby it was created and diffused. Then, the final section provides a general overview on the consequences of the use of such a term in the policy-making arenas.

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1 The term ‘securization of underdevelopment’ was coined in Newman, Edward. “Failed States and International Order: Constructing a Post-Westphalian World”, Contemporary Security Policy, 30 no.3 (2009), pp.421–443.
Introduction

Fractured or failing states [are] the main security challenge of our time. ³

The term ‘failed state’ is one of the most used and abused concepts in the last two decades: just to have an idea, by googling such a term, 710000 results are shown. Not only the Internet, but also the other means of communications have demonstrated a high level of attention towards this phenomenon⁴. First of all, it will be worth giving a hint of which states the term failed is associated to (a representation may be appreciated in Figure 1) and the organs conducting studies on such a topic. Indeed, several indices and definitions of failed states are available thus demonstrating a high level of attention towards this topic. Furthermore, since this paper argues in favour of the analytical unfeasibility of the concept of failed state, it will be pointless to provide a definition of the topic at this stage. Nonetheless, an overview is provided by Table 1, which lists the worst performers and their symptoms, and Figure 2, which contains the ten functions a state is supposed to carry out.

Newman⁵ identifies the most utilised indices, a list of which may be appreciated in Table 2. It is noteworthy briefly investigating which organs provide such studies; the reason for this will be evident in the ensuing sections. The Failed States Index⁶ is sponsored by the Fund for Peace and it is published by the Foreign Policy Journal. Such an index is composed of social, political and economical indicators. The second index, namely the Global Peace Index⁷, is sponsored by the Vision of Humanity, which is part of the Institute for Economics and Peace, a global think tank “dedicated to the research and education of the relationship between economic development,

⁴ The role of mass media has been prominent in the diffusion of such a term. Many authors and politicians, nonetheless, overestimate their role in the agenda-setting of policy-makers by referring to the ‘CNN effect’, as Tony Blair (Chicago, 22 April 1999), stated “We are continually fending off the danger of letting wherever CNN roves be the cattle prod to take global conflict seriously”. Conversely, various studies show that the so called ‘CNN effect’ has been overemphasized: “media follow, rather than lead” H. Holm, “Failing Failed States: Who Forgets the Forgotten?”, Security Dialogue, 33 no.4 (2002) p.457–471. Under this light, this work will focus on the role of epistemic communities and political elites relegating the means of communication to an ‘amplifying role’.
⁶ For further information concerning the indicators consult the official website: http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php (accessed 12/12/10).
⁷ See http://www.visionofhumanity.org/ (accessed 12/12/10).
business and peace\textsuperscript{8}. The main difference from the precedent one is that the Global Peace Index is more focused on the trends of armed conflicts, assuming the latter as the main indicator of state failure\textsuperscript{9}. The Human Development Index\textsuperscript{10} is associated with UN Development Programme and it has become one of the leading index for measuring state capacity in delivering public goods assuming public service delivery as an indicator of ‘state strength’. As shown below, the Human Development Index and the Global Peace Index presuppose different conceptions of the functions of the state, being the former based on a Locke\textsuperscript{an} approach to the state, perceived as a service provider\textsuperscript{11}, and the latter on a Weberian one, which conceives state’s functions as closely related to its capacity to monopolise coercion within a given territory\textsuperscript{12}. The Index of State Weakness\textsuperscript{13} in the Developing World of the Brookings Institution resembles the Failed States Index with stronger security connotations. Last but not least, the State Fragility Index\textsuperscript{14} of the Center for Systemic Peace and the Center for Global Policy at Maryland University and sponsored by the One Earth Future Foundation measures the state’s effectiveness and legitimacy.

Two noteworthy elements must be underlined: the nature of the institution providing such studies and the level of discrepancy between them. First of all, the majority of centres and institutes about failed states have historically been financed by governments. For instance, the State Failure Task Force, funded by the CIA and supported by US government, has produced a series of reports financed by governmental organs thus assuming a crucial role in US administration’s approach to such an issue. The role of think tanks as epistemic communities and the interactions between them and policy-makers will be duly analysed in the following sections. Secondly, at first glance the

\textsuperscript{8} 2010 GPI Results Report (www.visionofhumanity.org) (accessed 12/12/10).
\textsuperscript{9} Newman, Edward, “Failed States and International Order”.
\textsuperscript{13} See http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/02_weak_states_index.aspx (accessed 12/12/10).
\textsuperscript{14} See http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm (accessed 12/12/10).
discrepancies between the different rankings in Table 2 are evident. In fact, whilst there is consensus on the worst performers, the lists are rather dissimilar among themselves. Anyway, according to these studies, roughly a quarter of the states of the world are fragile in different degrees, either failing or already failed and the situation is not evolving in a positive way. Indeed, the clock for some states, namely the weakest ones, has remained blocked in the 1970s (as shown in Figure 3) without ameliorating their position. That is why, as illustrated below, many scholars put into question the “Westphalian ontology”15 calling for a post-sovereign international order.

The term ‘failed state’ has become in vogue not only in the academic and research fora, but also among practitioners (belonging to governmental or non-governmental organs). Bilgin and Morton16 trace a brief history of the label ‘failed state’ in comparison to ‘rogue state’. The main difference between them is generally based on a different focus, which is on the internal characteristics in the case of failed state and on the external behaviour in the case of rogue state17. Indeed, rogue state is used to indicate a behaviour of a given state in the international realm which is close in spirit to the concept of predation18, namely a state which does not follow the appropriate rules of the game determined by the “structure of identities and interests”19. After 9/11, rogue states came predominantly to the fore being perceived as the major source of international threat. “Unlike the Cold War”, President George W. Bush stated at the US National Defense University, “today's most urgent threat stems from [...] a small number of missiles in the hands of these states, states for whom terror and blackmail are a way of life”20. As may be deduced from such a quotation, the concerns about rogue states are more closely related to the classic conception of international security, whereas the concept of failed state is usually (or at least also) associated with the so called

17 Bilgin Pinar and Morton David, “Historicising Representations of ‘Failed States’”.
19 Ibid.
humanitarian security. Such a view has recently been challenged by many scholars advocating a juxtaposition between such approaches to security, as illustrated by Keohane: “future military actions in failed states, or attempts to bolster states that are in danger of failing, may be more likely to be described both as self-defence and as humanitarian or public-spirited”. Indeed, despite the differences, many factors bolster the interconnection between the terms failed and rogue. Indeed, being a failed state may be a precondition of being a rogue state, as pointed out by Nick Stern, senior vice president of the World Bank: “we have to understand the role of failed states that often provide or condone safe havens for organised terrorism”. Furthermore, many scholars and policymakers tend not to recognise any difference between such labels, perceived only as synonymises. Nevertheless, this paper limits the discussion to the concept of ‘failed state’ for several reasons. First of all, the concept of failed state is more related to the internal characteristics of a state and thus may be framed within the broader discussion on development. Secondly, it is a multi-faceted topic which is not limited to security issues but it extends also to economical, social and political factors. Last but not least, the term failed state has many implications on the ontological and epistemological aspects of the study of the international system. The following section illustrates the theoretical approaches to the study of failed states widespread in IR theories and political sciences.

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21 Eriksen, Stein, “‘State Failure’ in Theory and Practice”.
23 Bilgin Pinar Morton David, “From ‘Rogue’ to ‘Failed’ States?”.
The Theoretical State of Art

I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it.  

Newman identifies three main streams of studies on failed states, which will be thoroughly analysed in this section. It is worth conceiving them as “opinion clusters [which are] more or less structured networks [with] formally structured orientations or approaches to [certain] issues”. The first one comprises those scholars who uncritically accept the concept of failed state and therefore, they concentrate on the practical implications. The most noteworthy aspect of such a stream of thought is its policy-oriented nature; this is of crucial importance, as illustrated above, since it bears many consequences on how the studies are conducted and the results they have on the real world. Furthermore, another common feature characterizing this opinion cluster is its close interconnection with security studies. The following section will then analyse this in the light of the vast literature on epistemic communities and norm entrepreneurs with special attention to the relation between such an opinion cluster and policy-makers. The second stream of studies on failed states is based on a critical approach to such a concept and thus extending the analysis to broader discussions. As briefly mentioned above, the fact that roughly a quarter of the states in the international system has since their formation suffered from some form of weakness has led several scholars to call into question the pillars of the international arena. Starting from the concept of failed state, some authors

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26 Newman, Edward, “Failed States and International Order”.
28 Fukuyama, Francis, Esportare la Democrazia: State-building e Ordine Mondiale nel XXI Secolo, (Torino: Lindau, 2005); Ghani, Ashraf and Lockhart, Clare, Fixing Failed States; Rotberg, Robert, Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States; Rotberg, Robert, “The New Nature of Nation-State Failure”.
30 Newman, Edward, “Failed States and International Order”.

challenge the concept of sovereignty and the Westphalian system\textsuperscript{31}, whereas others focus on the epistemological factors which such a term bears starting from a critique to the first stream of studies\textsuperscript{32}; this paper may be framed in the latter approach, despite acknowledging the contributions of the others. Thirdly, many scholars have stressed the interventionist connotations of the concept of failed state thus wholly rejecting it\textsuperscript{33}. Needless to say, the division between such approaches is only for the sake of exposition and many juxtapositions exist among them, but for reasons of clarity it is worth analysing them separately.

The majority of studies on failed states may be included in the first opinion cluster and furthermore, this represents the so called ‘establishment approach’ towards this topic, namely roughly all relevant actors playing in the international system are influenced by it (states, international organizations etc.). For instance, the indices mentioned in the introduction are a clear expression of this stream of studies. Despite the high heterogeneity among such studies, several common features may be identified; Bilgin and Morton\textsuperscript{34} stress the common assumptions, which will be integrated by contributions from other authors. First of all, they all presuppose an approach to the development of the state inherently related to its internal characteristics in line with the so called ‘Washington consensus’\textsuperscript{35} and the approach typical of the international financial institutions (i.e. WTO and WB) since the 90s. Accordingly, the causes of the ‘failure’ are exclusively internal, aloof from any consideration on the colonial experience of those states\textsuperscript{36} and their position in the world-system\textsuperscript{37},


\textsuperscript{32} Bilgin Pinar Morton David, ‘From ‘Rogue’ to ‘Failed’ States?’; Eriksen, Stein, “‘State Failure’ in Theory and Practice”.

\textsuperscript{33} Pha, Anna and Symon, Peter, The “Failed States” Doctrine.

\textsuperscript{34} Bilgin Pinar Morton David, ‘From ‘Rogue’ to ‘Failed’ States?’.


\textsuperscript{36} As will be shown above, this approach has always been deaf to the claim of ‘bringing history back in’ typical of historical sociology.

\textsuperscript{37} The main centre of world-systems analysis may be considered the Fernand Braudel Centre for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems and Civilizations at SUNY Binghamton with the main contributions of Wallerstein, Arrighi, Hopkins etc.
namely the state is the agent of development. This fact bears important consequences, namely the reduction of state failure to empirically observable factors, which in turn may be easily manipulated by foreign policy-makers. Whatever the conception of the state is, that is either the Lockean or the Weberian approach, these studies focus on the symptoms of state failure without grasping the surface. The result is a categorization of states in order of weakness “rather like Victorian butterfly collectors, to construct lists and typologies of the different species”. A myriad of such categorisations are available in the literature, from simple dichotomies strong/weak, through detailed taxonomies to continua. Furthermore, the foreshown indices are revealing examples of categorizations of states according to different criteria resting on the assumptions of this stream of studies. As a result, the concept of state failure “rests on the assumptions about stateness against which any given state should be measured as having succeeded or failed”. As mentioned above, the main characteristic of this ‘opinion cluster’ is its policy-oriented nature. Indeed, the principal objective of categorising state is rarely a mere academic exercise: “the goal is to assess states in order to assist in calibrating the conditions for successful intervention”. The following section will cope in detail with the fallacies of this approach.

Regarding the second stream of studies, several differences between the various authors are present, though it is possible to identify two sub-groups. The first one comprises those scholars who, starting from the concept of failed state, put under inquiry the concept of sovereignty in its Westphalian conception. Accordingly, sovereignty is no more perceived as something monolithic and as a status

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38 Eriksen, Stein, “‘State Failure’ in Theory and Practice”.
42 Rotberg, Robert, “The New Nature of Nation-State Failure”.
per se, as in the words of Sorensen: “sovereignty is like being married, you either possess this status or you do not, one can no more be a 75 per cent sovereign than 75 per cent married”. Such an ontological revolution entails two assumptions: either a new post-national politics based on human rights or an international system where sovereignty remains a prerogative of states, which are capable of disaggregating, transferring and pooling it though. It is noteworthy that both of them bear interventionist (even neo-colonialist) consequences in their extremist versions. Indeed, the ‘responsibility to protect’ inherently bears with itself the ‘intervention dilemma’, namely the Westphalian state is not always compatible with global human rights; for instance state sovereignty may hamper humanitarian intervention and popular sovereignty may produce tyrannous government with deleterious effects for human rights. As Havel put it in occasion of the Kosovo tragedy: “the evolution of civilization have finally brought humanity to the recognition that human beings are more important than the state”. Furthermore, Krasner, assuming that “the fundamental rules of conventional sovereignty […] no longer work”, harshly criticises the policy tools repertoire (deriving from the studies of the first opinion cluster) hitherto used to cope with failed states. As a result, he proposes a variety of forms of ‘de facto trusteeship and shared sovereignty’ to deal with the problem of failed states. Regarding the second sub-group characterising this approach, many scholars have focused on the epistemological implications of the concept failed state.

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46 Ibid.


49 Chandler, David, “R2P or Not R2P?”.

50 Bellamy, Richard, “Sovereignty, Post-Sovereignty and Pre-Sovereignty”.


52 Krasner, Stephen, “Sharing Sovereignty New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States”.

53 Ibid., p.85.

this approach will be utilised in detail below, it is sufficient to mention two facts. Firstly, the discussion on the concept of failed states may not be separated from the broader discussion on development. Secondly, the concept concerned is put aside as an analytical tool, thus focusing on it as a discursive construction. The factors behind its creation and the effects it bears will be duly analysed in the ensuing section, which provides a critique of the aforementioned first opinion cluster from the point of view of the second one.

The third opinion cluster focuses on the rhetorical aspects of the concept of failed state underlining its interventionist connotations. In line with what Johnston\(^55\) defines as the second generation of security studies, namely the approach to security widespread in the mid-80s (but still in vogue in certain academic niches) which focused on the rhetorical use of concepts by politicians\(^56\), this stream of though focuses on the ‘failed state doctrine’\(^57\). Indeed, Pha and Symon\(^58\) stressed the instrumental use of the concept of failed state for various purposes (all with interventionist consequences). For instance, the concept may be used in order to fill the vacuum left by the fall of the Soviet Union and thus the lack of a nemesis for the US hegemony\(^59\) or simply to pursue neo-colonialist policies. As in Havel\(^60\) words : “I really do inhabit a system [...] where words can prove mightier than ten military divisions”. This paper, despite acknowledging the importance of the instrumental use of rhetoric, extends the analysis to the discursive origins of the term ‘failed state’.


\(^{57}\) Pha, Anna and Symon, Peter, *The “Failed States” Doctrine*.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.

\(^{59}\) Bilgin Pinar Morton David, “From ‘Rogue’ to ‘Failed’ States?”.

Failed Theories

Failed states tend to be the Bart Simpsons of the international community; they are permanent underachievers\(^{61}\).

This section analyses under new epistemological premises the fallacies of the aforementioned first opinion cluster and its attempts to utilize the concept of failed state as a purely analytical tool. This analysis may not be separated from the broader discussion on development, of which the concept of failed state is a derivation. Indeed, the discourse on failed state is inherently interconnected with the modernisation theories on development formulated in the 1950s/1960s. As all concepts, which are supposed to describe reality with a certain degree of abstraction and without normative connotations, the definition of failed state has to respect a twofold requirement\(^{62}\): the coverage of all phenomena concerned and the inclusion of all (and only) external characteristics. Such a concept (especially in the Weberian conception of state’s functions) does not add anything to the already possessed tools used to analyse states\(^{63}\). Furthermore, as demonstrated by Rist, the concept of development as created in the 1950s/1960s (and still strongly embedded in people’s collective imaginaire) falls short in respecting such requirements. Some of the criticisms which Rist refers to the Rostowian organic conception of development apply in turn also to the concept of ‘failed state’ (the reasons for such a parallelism will be clearer in the next section). Such a concept relies on a given perception of development which has many characteristics. First of all, it entails a marked ‘directional’ (if not teleological) connotation with two main consequences. For some authors the principal assumption is that development follows a defined path, which is the one already walked

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\(^{61}\) Gros, Jean-Germain, “Towards a Taxonomy of Failed States in the New World Order”.


by *developed* states. Indeed, it is characterised by a strong ethnocentrism or by what Latour calls ‘particular universalism’\(^{64}\) falling thus in the field of studies of sociology’s institutionalism, namely the diffusion of Western values, norms and institutions as benchmarks to analyse (and evaluate) other realities\(^{65}\). For others, the unit of measure is the ideal-type of state and obviously “compared to an ideal, reality is bound to appear as incomplete, even in the cases that served as the basis for the construction of the idea in the first place”\(^{66}\). The concept of sovereignty, like the concept of modernity, becomes to function like Fitzgerald’s green light\(^{67}\): something sought but never reached.

This approach is ethnocentric in a more subtle way, in that it compares also the (Western) states themselves, which have been the basis for the creation of the ideal-type of state, to the concept derived from them. The logic behind the indices shown in the introduction is just this. Furthermore, the concept of failed state as conceived by the first opinion cluster is markedly a-historical, namely it suffers from what Hobden and Hobson\(^{68}\) define chronofetishism and tempocentrism. Indeed, the concept of failed state rests on the assumption that the present is something reified, naturalized (namely emerged spontaneously) and cut off from its historical context. Indeed, failed states are not perceived as former colonies: the elephant in the room is usually ignored. With decolonisation “their right [of colonies] to self-determination had been acquired in exchange for a right to self-definition”\(^{69}\): the term ‘colony’ disappeared along with its historical legacy. Furthermore, tempocentrism leads to the practice of conceiving the past in function of the present and thus seeing history as characterized by isomorphic systems functional to the ultimate stage and which alternate

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\(^{64}\) Rist, Gilbert, *The History of Development*.


\(^{66}\) Eriksen, Stein, “‘State Failure’ in Theory and Practice”, p.6.


\(^{68}\) Hobden, Stephen and Hobson, John, *Historical sociology of international relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

\(^{69}\) Rist, Gilbert, *The History of Development*, p.79.
one after the other. A revealing example is the Rostowian take-off model\textsuperscript{70}, which represents the apex of modernisation theories and the basis for the Western approach to the Third World for more than two decades. Thirdly, the concept of failed state relies on a conceptualization of the interaction between state and society as two separated (even counterpoised) realms. This phenomenon, defined as the ‘Huntingtonian formula’\textsuperscript{71}, is one of the characteristics which link the concept of failed state to the ‘securization of underdevelopment’ at the beginning of the Cold War; the next section will deal with this aspect. The ethnocentric, a-historical and teleological conception of development and the concept of failed state in turn represents the central element of the modern religion\textsuperscript{72}: it is a mixture of beliefs and practices with strong normative connotations. Accordingly, it is worth analysing the concept concerned in its discursive connotation rather than in its analytical use. Under the light of a post-modern conception of development the next section copes with development (and the concept of failed state) as a discourse, a social construction\textsuperscript{73}.

The solutions sought by IR scholars to circumvent such a problem and thus individuating an analytically viable concept in order to describe reality are numerous, though they will be only mentioned. Some of them focus on the social forces in the historical creation of the state thus overcoming the Huntingtonian separation between state and society\textsuperscript{74}. Others claim the reunification of international political economy with security studies\textsuperscript{75} whereas there are scholars who pose themselves in the broader discussion on development questing for an higher role of history. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the discourse on development has overcome the fallacies typical of its earlier approaches and thus introducing new elements in its theories, such as detailed


\textsuperscript{72} Rist, Gilbert, \textit{The History of Development}.


\textsuperscript{74} Bilgin Pinar and Morton David, “Historicising Representations of ‘Failed States’; Eriksen, Stein, ‘‘State Failure’ in Theory and Practice.

historical analyses and a trans-disciplinary approach. After demonstrated the analytical unfeasibility of the concept of failed state, the next section will cope with the use of failed state as a discursive construct. Accordingly, it will be worth understanding the reason why the approach to failed state has remained a-historical and mono-disciplinary.

The (Re)Securization of Underdevelopment

Sembra quasi che la storia, affannata per i balzi fatti nei due millenni precedenti, si riavvoltoli su se stessa.

This section analyses the concept of failed state as a discursive construction and it copes with its origins. A caveat is needed: the method utilised is qualitative discourse analysis, under the light of an agent-centered constructivism with the focus on the role of epistemic communities and norm entrepreneurs in creating and propelling inter-subjective understandings. The foreshown indices and the major studies of the members of the first opinion cluster are analysed in order to deduce the logics behind the origins of the term failed state.

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77 Eco, Umberto, A Passo di Gambro. Guerre Calde e Populismo Mediatico, (Milano: Bompiani, 2006) referring to Fukuyama’s thesis on the ‘end of history’. Literal translation: “It seems that history, panting from the leaps it has made in the previous two millennia, is rolling itself up”.
As pointed out by many scholars\textsuperscript{80} the concept of development in modernization theories and accordingly, underdevelopment are discursive products of the post-World War II era. This part copes with the concept of failed state as an ‘inter-subjective understanding’ which is sustained through agency and which shape identities and interests of agents\textsuperscript{81} by focusing on the similarities between the post-World War II discourse on development and the one on failed states in the last two decades. A parallel may be drawn between the \textit{phenomena} which led to the creation of the modernisation theories of development in the 1950s/1960s and the ones which led to the concept of failed state. As underlined by Gilman\textsuperscript{82}, the concept of development (or better of underdevelopment) was a discursive construction which was to play a crucial role in the ‘psychological warfare’ throughout the Cold War. In 1950 the Project Troy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) led to the creation of the Centre for International Studies (CIS) in 1952 under the \textit{aegis} of Millikan, who in turn recruited for research activities Lerner (communication scholar), Pye (political scientist), Rostow (economist)\textsuperscript{83} and Hagen (philosopher). The project, funded by the CIA and the Ford Foundation, had the precise mandate to consider different types of propaganda methods. Whilst the members, who were all Lasswell’s protégés and strongly influenced by his view of political psychology, had different backgrounds (economics, social sciences, psychology etc.), they had one aspect in common: they were all markedly interconnected with security and strategic studies. Indeed, many of them played an active role in World War II with respect to strategic studies; for instance, during World War II Rostow served in the Office of Strategic Services\textsuperscript{84}. The result of the Troy project were different policy proposals between 1954 and 1961, in which the theory of modernisation was drawn, and which took a crucial


\textsuperscript{81} Widmaier, Wesley, Blyth, Mark and Seabrooke, Leonard, “Exogenous Shocks or Endogenous Constructions?”.

\textsuperscript{82} Gilman, Nils, \textit{Mandarins of the Future}.

\textsuperscript{83} Not by chance Rostow’s masterpiece, which represents the \textit{manifesto} of the modernisation theory, was in its English and original version titled \textit{The Stages of Economic Growth: A non-communist manifesto}.

\textsuperscript{84} The Guardian, 17 February 2003.
role in the formation of the US policy toward the so called Third World. Several factors bolstered the influence of the CIS, such as the high power of the conservatives (with the Eisenhower’s Administration and the Republican majority in Congress), the beginning of the Cold War and the way the discourse was structured.

A comparison may be drawn in order to deduce the similarities between these two historical momenta and understand the reasons why the result was the (re)securization of underdevelopment. First of all, many structural characteristics are similar, in that both the 1950s and the 1990s may be considered as crises of the international system. Secondly, such historical momenta were characterised by an high influence of (neo)conservatives in the US Administration and of (ultra)modernists in the American social sciences. Accordingly, the result was what Newman calls the securization of underdevelopment; this section focuses on this aspect despite acknowledging the importance of the other factors.

As mentioned above, two factors bolstered the creation of the ethnocentric and a-historical concept of failed state as propelled by the first opinion cluster: the influence of security and strategic studies and the close interconnection between scholarship and policy-making. Although these two factors are mutually bolstering, this part will analyse them separately. Many authors emphasise the merging of security and development in the creation of the term failed state with the result of limiting the development agenda to geostrategic and security interests. The ‘silliest academic development of the Cold War’, namely the isolation of security studies from other approaches, is one of the main reasons for the creation of the concept of failed state. The mechanism whereby this happened is

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85 Gilman, Nils, Mandarins of the Future.
86 For reasons of time and space, this paper will cope only with the relation between security studies (more specifically strategic studies given the close interconnection with policy-makers) and development (and in turn the concept of failed state). Despite the high importance of the mentioned factors, it is appropriate to limit the analysis in this regard. For the same reasons the analysis will be deepened only with respect to the historical momentum at the end of the Cold War.
88 Newman, Edward, “Failed States and International Order”.
89 Bilgin Pinar and Morton David, “Historicising Representations of Failed States”.
90 Newman, Edward, “Failed States and International Order”.
91 Buzan, Barry and Little, Richard, “Beyond Westphalia?”.
termed by Hay\textsuperscript{92} conjunctural mode of political rationality: the solution to an external \textit{stimulus} is sought in the pre-existing structure of the system, namely the markedly geostrategic security studies typical of the Cold War. Accordingly, reality is framed in a way suitable for pre-existing analytical/operational tools, and not vice versa; as brilliantly pointed out by Maslow\textsuperscript{93}: “I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail”. The result was the discursive creation of the concept of ‘failed state’ through a process of abstraction in which “contradictions are brought together in a simplified inter-subjective understanding within a broader meta-narration”\textsuperscript{94}. As a result, “although the ‘formal Cold War’ has ceased – involving the stalemate between capitalism and communism – a ‘structural Cold War’ still prevails – involving new justifications for the persistence of old institutions”\textsuperscript{95}. A second hand data analysis carried out on the main international economic newspapers\textsuperscript{96} revealed that the term ‘failed state’ and the related jargon was mentioned only once in the last two decades: this is telling of the monopoly which security studies enjoy in this field. Once demonstrated the origins of such a concept, it is worth understanding its discursive characteristics which led to its diffusion. The discourse on failed state is so diffused and broadly (almost universally) accepted in that it bears several features which are typical of a successful narrative. First of all, it is centered on the concept of ‘direct responsibility’\textsuperscript{97}, namely there is widespread consensus on the fact that bad governance in failed states is the reason for their situation. Indeed, in the first opinion cluster the agency-based approach\textsuperscript{98}, namely the conception that state failure is man-made, is a common assumption. Secondly, the same factor which led to the creation of such a concept has bolstered its diffusion among practitioners and

\textsuperscript{92} Hay, Colin, “Crisis and Structural Transformation of the State”.

\textsuperscript{93} Maslow, Abraham, \textit{The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance}, (ReinventingYourself.com, 2004).

\textsuperscript{94} Hay, Colin, “Crisis and Structural Transformation of the State”.


\textsuperscript{96} Easterly, William and Freschi, Laura, 2010, “Top 5 reasons why “failed state” is a failed concept”.

\textsuperscript{97} Hay, Colin, “Crisis and Structural Transformation of the State”.

\textsuperscript{98} Rotberg, Robert, “The New Nature of Nation-State Failure”.
academics: the fact that it does not represent a ‘Copernican revolution’ in IR theories is an advantage given the resistance to change typical of social and political sciences, as pointed out by several behavioural scientists. Thirdly, a successful narrative has to recruit a variety of external tangible symptoms in a simplified, general and flexible generalisation99. In fact, as illustrated above, the studies of the first opinion cluster associate to the term failed states a myriad of complex political, economical, social phenomena (see Figure 2 and Table 1). Accordingly, all the evil in the world may be reduced to a sole source: failed states. In fact, this narrative points at a clearly defined enemy, which incarnates the perfect nemesis of liberal democracy. Thirdly, these types of studies have enjoyed a great attention by the means of dissemination: from the Internet, where the foreshown indices are available, through the broadcasting world to more specialist means of communication, such as the political and IR publications100. Last but not least, the role of epistemic communities and their close relation with policy-making arenas has strongly supported the diffusion of such a narrative not only in the academic world but also in the real one101. A telling example is the fact that the aforementioned Failed State Index is taken as a benchmark in the 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy & Development Review, which sets the priorities of US Administration in the development policy arena.

The other factor which led to the discursive creation of failed state is the close interconnection between the scholars and policy-makers and the role of norm entrepreneur the former have played. Indeed, the similarities between the task force created at the MIT in the 1950s and the Political Instability Task Force (PITF) created in 1994 are revealing in this regard. Both funded by the CIA and established on explicit request of the US Administration, these two bodies had (and the latter still has) the objective of carrying out studies for US policy-making. In fact, the 1995 report of the PITF may be considered a milestone for the concept of state failure: it is considered the first comprehensive attempt to tackle this issue. Not only does such a close relation bear several

99 Hay, Colin, “Crisis and Structural Transformation of the State”.
100 Figure 4 illustrates the frequency at which the term failed state has appeared in the articles of Foreign Affairs.
101 Pha, Anna and Symon, Peter, The “Failed States” Doctrine.
consequences on the high attention granted to the narrative of failed states by practitioners, but also on the way the narrative itself is structured. Concerning the first aspect, many scholars underline the role of think tanks as norm entrepreneur in this regard. Institutes, such as the aforementioned ones providing the failed states indices and many others (the American Enterprise Institute, the Institute for State Effectiveness, the British Foreign Policy Centre and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute\textsuperscript{102}, for instance), have been able to “convince a critical mass of [actors] to embrace new norms”\textsuperscript{103}. Furthermore, also prominent scholars have played such a role and thus blurring the line between practitioners and academics; telling examples are Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary in the Blair government and Stephen Krasner, the former Director of Policy Planning at the United States Department of State\textsuperscript{104}. Their role as norm entrepreneurs has been supported by many exogenous factors, such as the influence of conservatives in key states and the high role of ultra-modernists in social sciences.

Such a close relation between academic and policy-making fora has influenced also the discursive creation itself of the concept of failed state in two main manners. Firstly, the fact that the first opinion cluster’s studies focus only on measurable and material indicators of this phenomenon is related to the necessity to build policies on such studies\textsuperscript{105}. Secondly, the solutions implicitly or explicitly suggested by these studies are of managerial and organisational nature\textsuperscript{106}. That is why the aforementioned ‘Huntingtonian formula’ is a characteristic of this approach to failed states: the solution is sought at the state level, which is more manageable than the societal one. Thirdly, such institutional tools represent a one-size-fits-all model perceived as a ‘silver bullet’ solution. A noteworthy factor is their inherently interventionist connotation based on institutional engineering.

\textsuperscript{102} For an analysis of the impact of the ASPI in Australian foreign policy in the field of failed states see Pha, Anna and Symon, Peter, \textit{The “Failed States” Doctrine}. Whilst such a contribution is not so impartial, if handled with care it may provide a practical example of the consequences of the normative use of ‘failed state’.

\textsuperscript{103} Finnemore, Martha and Sikkink, Kathryn, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change”, p.895.

\textsuperscript{104} Pha, Anna and Symon, Peter, \textit{The “Failed States” Doctrine}.

\textsuperscript{105} Newman, Edward, “Failed States and International Order”.

As a consequence, the concept of failed state may be perceived as a discursive construction, but also as a normative concept. Indeed, whilst it falls short in describing reality and thus being analytically unfeasible, it represents a model towards which policy-makers aspire. Accordingly, reality is shaped in order to fulfil the model and not viceversa. As stated before, inter-subjective understandings shape the identities and in turn the interests of actors. The consequences of the uncritical use of the concept of failed state in the policy-making are several and they will be only mentioned for reasons of time and space. First of all, there is the risk of a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’, namely a juxtaposition between the ‘me’ and the ‘I’ of the allegedly failed states: if they are perceived and dealt with by other states as failed states it is probable they will become so. Secondly, the narrative of failed state has interventionist and even neo-colonialist connotations if instrumentally deployed, as mentioned above. Thirdly, spurious interpretations of ‘failed states’ may lead (and actually have led) to ineffective or disproportionate actions thus creating dynamics of path dependence (a sort of vicious circle).

Conclusion

There were six men of Hindustan,
to learning much inclined,
Who went to see an elephant,
though all of them were blind,
That each by observation
might satisfy his mind.
[...]
So six blind men of Hindustan
disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
exceeding stiff and strong:

107 Wendt, Alexander, “Anarchy is what States Make of it”.

21
Though each was partly in the right,
they all were in the wrong!\textsuperscript{108}

As the quotation by the Nobel Laureate Eco suggests, the structural common characteristics in place at the beginning and at the end of the Cold War have led to the same \textit{phenomenon}, namely the securization of underdevelopment. Despite the differences, it is beyond any doubt that the concept of failed state and the related jargon is a derivation of an approach to development inextricably connected with security and strategic studies. The same factors which have contributed to its creation have also played a crucial role in its diffusion as the mainstream narrative about development in the last two decades. Unfortunately, this has borne several drastic consequences in the way the major powers have coped with the rest of the world. A last caveat is needed: the objective of this paper is neither to give definite answers to the problem nor to fall into an infinite vicious circle on the epistemology of knowledge. Concerning the first point, the aim of this work is to underline the dynamics whereby the term failed state has been created, not to propose an alternative narrative on the development of the state. Regarding the second point, this paper tries to avoid the eternal struggle between holism and individualism, which has been at the centre of the debate in social sciences since the 19th century. Indeed, constructivist theories tend to fall into the trap of cultural relativism, which may lead in turn to a firm stalemate in any research activity. Nonetheless, even though not so easily achievable several times, the quest for analytically viable concepts is a reasonable objective also in IR theories: the important point is to acknowledge that such analytical tools derive from given agents acting in given circumstances and thus they may be the objects of analysis and evaluation themselves. In a pioneering work on the epistemology of knowledge, Puchala (1971) compares the blind men of the notorious story with the scholars of IR. Indeed, like the blind men trying to identify the mysterious being by touching different parts of it, scholars of IR conduct their research activities in the same way: by focusing on different

dimensions of the same *phenomenon* and also by wearing different theoretical glasses. Nevertheless, as in the case of the blind men, there are not absolutely right or wrong answers.
Table 1: Failed States in 2010 and related symptoms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country (Population, m)</th>
<th>Failed states index, score*</th>
<th>Life expectancy, years</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somalia (9.4)</td>
<td>114.3</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>Anarchy, civil war, piracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad (11.5)</td>
<td>113.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>Desertification, destitution, meddling neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan (43.2)</td>
<td>111.8</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>Ethnic, religious strife, illiteracy, tyranny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe (12.6)</td>
<td>110.2</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>Economic collapse, kleptocracy, oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo (67.8)</td>
<td>109.9</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>Civil war, massacres, mass rape, looting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan (29.1)</td>
<td>109.3</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>Civil war, drugs, no infrastructure, terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq (31.6)</td>
<td>107.3</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>Ruined infrastructure, sectarian strife, terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Republic (4.5)</td>
<td>106.4</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>Desertification, destitution, disease, terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea (10.3)</td>
<td>105.0</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>Destitution, drugs, kleptocracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan (184.8)</td>
<td>102.5</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>Coups, drugs, illiteracy, terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti (10.2)</td>
<td>101.6</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>Deforestation, destitution, crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire (21.6)</td>
<td>101.2</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>Incipient civil war, post-election deadlock</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Out of a potential 120, based on 12 indicators

Source: Economist, Mar 17th 2011
Table 2: 40 Lowest States in 2009 (in order of weakness)

*Source:* see notes 3-7 (the idea of listing the 40 weakest states in such indices is borrowed from Newman,)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>The Failed States Index</th>
<th>Global Peace Index</th>
<th>Human Development Index</th>
<th>Index of State Weakness</th>
<th>State Fragility Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dem. Rep. of the Congo</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Chad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
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<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Central African Rep.</td>
<td>Myanmar (Burma)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>Cote D’Ivoire</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ethiopia</td>
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<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>Congo, Rep.</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
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<td>Cameroon</td>
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<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
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<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
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<td>Haiti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: State Fragility and Warfare in the Global System, 2009

Figure 2: The Ten Functions of the State

Figure 3: UNDP HDI (10 lowest) – 1970-2010

Figure 4: Term Failed State in *Foreign Affairs* articles

Source: Easterly W. and Freschi L., 2010, Top 5 reasons why “failed state” is a failed concept, Aidwatch (http://aidwatchers.com/) (accessed 21/01/11)
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