MILITARY INTERVENTION IN FAILED STATES:
Planning and Force Development Considerations

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Introduction.

The global security environment is in the midst of an historic transformation. Changing norms, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and broad spectrum interconnectedness are making large scale, state-on-state war increasingly rare. But peace is not breaking out all over. As fragile regimes face increasing demands, fractionalization, ecological decay, and population pressures, internal conflict of all types, from general instability to full blown civil war remains common and likely to become even more so. As a result, stability and peace operations are replacing traditional warfighting as the primary challenge for most of the world's militaries.

Intervention in failed states is a subcategory of stability and peace operations, but one of the most complex kinds. It calls for creating security from a weak or nonexistent foundation. Since state failure results from the collapse of previous balances, relationship and coalitions, parties, or regions, intervention takes place during a power struggle which is often confusing to outsiders. In many cases, a failed state represents only a diffused security risk to outsiders with the capacity to deal with it. This, in combination with the long term commitment usually required to rehabilitate a failed state, means that the interveners often enter with limited political will and thus with a propensity to withdraw in the face of inadequate progress or escalating costs.

That said, the militaries of all advanced states and, with some support, many middle level...
and small states can successfully adapt to intervention in failed states. But adaptation is necessary. For militaries with a significant focus on stability operations and peacekeeping such as the Canadian, many European, and most African ones, this is not a difficult process. For militaries focused on conventional warfighting such as the American or Russian the adaptation to stability operations and intervention in failed states requires more effort, but still can be done. Success demands a different mindset and framework for operational planning and force development than conventional warfighting. This paper will sketch a framework for operational planning and force development in response to failed states.

**A Multinational Force Commander's Wish List.**

Most often, an intervening force in a failed states will be multinational. Strategic geography dictates this: failed states occur in the less developed parts of the world where governments are fragile. In such regions, neighboring states seldom have the military, economic, or political power to undertake a unilateral intervention and reconstruction of the failed state. While the many of the advanced nations of North America, Europe, or the Pacific do have the military, economic, or political power to undertake a unilateral intervention in a failed state, they seldom if ever have the incentive to do so since physical distance diminishes the extent of risk posed by state failure. As a result, multinational interventions have been and will continue to be the norm.

Commanding a multinational force with mixed capabilities, operational methods, organizational cultures, and degree of commitment is not an easy task. But a commander who can master this complexity can attain success. A multinational force, if well-composed and well-
led, can have international legitimacy, resiliency, staying power, and a wide range of capabilities. To assure this, every commander of a multinational intervention force has a strategic and operational "wish list." This would include:

- A clear and comprehensive mandate for the operation. In recent years, this has not been a major problem. Given the humanitarian disasters that accompany state failure, the United Nations has been more than willing to authorize intervention. Constructing an intervention force has been the problem. Obtaining a U.N. mandate for intervention in the future might not be automatic if opposed by a permanent member of the Security Council, the nations which border on the failed state, or a shell government in the failed state. While most nations generally accept the idea that state failure is a bad thing that should be ended, it is possible that a state might consider anarchy to its advantage, particularly if the state that failed is a traditional enemy. But in the absence of U.N. action, regional and even subregional organizations like the new African Union can provide legitimacy. What a force commander needs, though, is a mandate robust enough to allow not only the restoration of security, but also steps to reconstitute the failed state and make it self-sustaining.

- An adequate degree of political will on the part of the key contributors to the intervention. Will has been and will continue to be the most problematic commodity for the commander of an intervention force. Generally the will to sustain an intervention to the point of sustainable success is highest among states in the same region as the failed one (since their national interests may be directly threatened), and a handful of other states that have made peace and stability operations a national priority. This includes some of the major European nations, Canada, Pakistan, and a few others. The United States has vacillated in its perspective on intervention in failed states. Because of the extent of the U.S.'s global commitments, it has shied away from large scale interventions such as those discussed for the Democratic

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Republic of Congo, preferring instead to support intervention by others or to undertake short term operations intended only to staunch humanitarian disasters.

• An adequate force appropriately trained, supplied, and equipped. This poses fewer problems now than it did a decade ago. Many nations have peacekeeping experience and methods for appropriate training and professional education. Difficulties continue to arise, though, when the failed state is in the midst of civil war rather than simply a collapse of order. Under these conditions the commander of the intervening force must assure that his component units have adequate capability to defeat or deter the warring parties. This can include possession of armor, artillery, and aviation in addition to the infantry and support units required for intervention or peacekeeping in a more benign environment.

• Intra-theater mobility. One of the greatest shortcomings on the part of many of the world's militaries, including those which participate in peacekeeping or humanitarian intervention, is inadequate mobility. In the rugged physical environments that often characterize failed states, this usually means aviation, whether by fixed wing or rotary aircraft. The problem is not simply a paucity of aircraft, but also of the ability to build bases and maintain the platforms in a rugged or austere environment. Because of this, a force commander often finds that his major operational dilemma during intervention in a failed state is not a shortage of troops, but an inability to get them where they are needed. Thus the greater the intra-theater mobility capability of the intervening force, the better.

• An adequate logistics system. Many militaries are well trained, well led, and capable of effective peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention, but incapable of sustaining themselves when deployed outside their own country. As the Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld points out, failure to understand the role of logistics "has probably led to many more campaigns being ruined than ever were by enemy action."1 Because the infrastructure of failed states—which was usually poor to begin with—has collapsed, an intervening forces faces significant logistics challenges. There will be few or no local sources of basic supplies like bottled water, and getting

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supplies to widely dispersed units is a challenge. Thus a force commander must add a robust logistics capability to his "wish list."

- Adequate and appropriate *intelligence*. Every military operation depends on intelligence for success. The collection, assessment, and dissemination of intelligence during intervention in a failed state is extremely difficult. At the front end of the process, the force commander is likely to have a shortage of collection assets, whether human or technical, and of intelligence units. Equally, sharing of intelligence within a multinational coalition always poses problems. Coalition members may see others as potential future enemies, and thus be very hesitant to reveal their intelligence capabilities. And at a higher level, the ability of the United Nations to provide strategic intelligence is very limited. The normal result is intelligence "stove piping" where each national contingent relies on its own capabilities, thus leaving the force commander and his subordinate commanders with an imperfect picture of the operation. The type of intelligence that a force commander would need during intervention in a failed state adds to the problem. Militaries are accustomed to collecting and assessing "order of battle" intelligence on discernible enemies, but during intervention in a failed state, the force commander would also need political, economic, and cultural intelligence. Civilian intelligence agencies should be able to provide this, but cooperation between them and the intervening military force raises even more intractable problems with sharing.

- Effective *linkages* with nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, and non-military state agencies. The profusion of multinational peacekeeping operations since the end of the Cold War has greatly improved the ability of the militaries that participate in them to work with non-military organizations. The U.S. military, for instance, helped develop the Civil-Military Operations Center (CMOC) concept designed to synchronize the efforts of a peacekeeping force and nongovernmental organizations. This has been a very valuable step, but the synchronization becomes even more complex in a failed state situation due to the large number of state and non-state organizations that play a role.
Planning Considerations.

The basic tactical and operational planning tool used by most militaries is called "METT-T"—mission, enemy, troops, terrain, and time. With some adaptation, this can provide the basis for planning during intervention in a failed state.

Mission. The mission given an intervening force in a failed state falls somewhere along a spectrum. The most limited one is to extricate foreign nationals—an operation known as a noncombatant evacuation operation or NEO. NEOs are, by their nature, over quickly. They may be dangerous and tactically complex, but are seldom strategically or politically complex. International law recognizes the right of states to undertake NEOs. In the case of the United States, the Marine Corps is often given NEO missions and tends to be very good at them. A more ambitious mission during intervention in a failed state would be to provide sanctuary for noncombatants in a designated area. The next step up in mission complexity would be to restore stability or order, perhaps stopping humanitarian disaster at the same time. The most ambitious and complex mission would be to establish security and then participate in the reconstruction of the country. This would entail assuring security over the mid and long term, conflict amelioration through participation in negotiations, possibly participating in the reconstruction of national infrastructure, and providing training, equipment, and support to reconstituted local security forces.

Multinational force commanders frequently find that the national contingents in the coalition do not define the mission in the same way. Some, for instance, may only be interested in restoring basic security and stopping a humanitarian disaster while others may be committed...
to the ultimate rebuilding of the state. Since this is a political issue, there is little the force commander can do, but he must be aware of such schisms.

**Enemy.** This element of traditional military planning requires significant revision for intervention in a failed state. Even if the intervening force faces a discernible foe, the enemy will almost never be a normal, organized military. The enemy will, instead, be one or many informal, sometimes amorphous organizations, whether criminal gangs, militias, insurgent movements, guerrilla armies, or terrorist groups. Identifying its members and supporters can be difficult. Operational and strategic planning in a failed state environment must go beyond an assessment of the enemy order of battle and also delineate the source of recruits, funds, and supplies. Moreover, the "enemy" may be conditions or phenomena rather than a discrete organization. Disease, inadequate resources for basic human needs, instability, dysfunctional infrastructure, inter-group hatred, and crime will often be the enemies. Even though these things are different than the sort of enemy that armed forces usually think of, advanced militaries can deal with them. Various types of medical and support units can address basic human needs, disease, and infrastructure problems. Psychological operations and civil affairs units can help ameliorate hatred and reestablish civil order. Military police can tackle instability and crime. The key is that operational planning must correctly identify the enemies, whether it is an organization or a phenomenon, and then assign a priority and risk to each.

**Troops.** This planning element is an assessment of the forces available in the coalition. In a multinational coalition, this can be difficult. The force commander needs an accurate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of his forces, but this can be difficult to do using a multinational staff. Adverse assessments are likely to leak back to the national component in
question and, inevitably, to the government providing that contingent. In addition, planners in a multinational intervention force must define "troops" much more broadly than in normal military planning. Nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, non-military state organizations must be considered. In addition, the components of state militaries not actually involved in the intervention but capable of supporting it such as intelligence units must also be factored in.

**Terrain.** As with troops, terrain must be defined very broadly when planning an intervention in a failed state. In addition to the physical, infrastructural, and meteorological factors that are normally included, terrain assessment in a failed state must assess the role of outside states, the developmental level of the failed state; the existence of surviving civil institutions; cultural, religious, ethnic, clan, and sectional divisions; historical enmities, refugee flows and dislocations; and basic humanitarian considerations such the adequacy of food, shelter, water, and medicine.

**Time.** The time assessment must have two components: 1) the time required to successfully complete the mission (which could be a day for a NEO, decades for a full reconstruction of a badly damaged, complex state); and, 2) the estimated time that the members of the intervening force are likely to sustain the effort. If these two time components are not similar, the only recourse for the force commander is to advise the political leaders of the participating nations and hope that they can reach reconciliation.

Three other considerations are also important for planning an intervention in a failed state. One is the phasing of the operation. In very broad terms, an intervention will have five phases: 1) preparation; 2) deployment and initial entry; 3) consolidation; 4) reconstruction; and
5) handoff. A significant proportion of the activity in the preparation phase would be diplomatic, as national leaders seek a mandate and construct a coalition. But in addition to the actual preparation of troops, intelligence collection, assessment and dissemination, and detailed strategic and operational planning should take place in this phase. In the deployment and initial entry phase, advanced militaries will play the leading role due to their superior transportation capabilities and ability to undertake widespread, rapid operations under hostile conditions. The consolidation phase would expand the area under the control of the intervening force. Less advanced militaries can play a larger role during the reconstruction phase when the primary effort is conflict control and building infrastructure, economies, civil institutions, and security organizations. The intervening force would continue to provide a stabilizing influence, but might also be involved in negotiations, engineering projects, civil affairs, training and education. The goal would be a steady assumption of greater responsibility first by outside non-military organizations and then by indigenous organizations. While advanced nations might continue to provide an emergency rapid reaction force and support other reconstruction functions, it would be possible for less advanced militaries to play a greater role. The handoff phase would see indigenous organizations assume full or nearly full responsibility for order and governance. Some outside forces might stay on to assist with training and to provide a stabilizing role, but at this point the failed state would be on its feet again.

The second important consideration for planning an intervention in a failed state is force rotation. This would obviously not been an issue for a short term mission designed to evacuate foreign nationals or provide temporary sanctuary, but would be very important in long term missions aimed at national reconstruction. Force planners would need to assess the amount of...
time that various national contingents would be deployed, work with the militaries of the coalition states to assure that replacements were available, and see that replacements are oriented once they arrive. If a nation sent a unit to replace one of its own, the replacement, orientation, and training processes could be a national responsibility. If a unit from one nation replaced one from another, the staff of the intervention force would need to play a more active role.

The third important consideration for planning an intervention in a failed state is identifying **indicators of success**. There are many such indicators—absence of armed conflict, economic resuscitation, infrastructure constructed, effectiveness of indigenous security forces, and so forth. They will vary according to the conditions in the failed state, conditions in the global security environment, the nature of the mission, and the phase of the operation. Force planners must identify the ones most relevant to their mission, develop methods of assessing them, and provide this information to the force commander, mandating authority, and national participants.

**Force Development.**

For greatest chance of success in reconstructing failed states, the nations which might undertake it must prepare their militaries even when no intervention is underway or imminent. Force development includes: 1) military professional education; 2) augmenting coalition capabilities; 3) concept and doctrine development; 4) training; and 5) technology development. Most militaries have systems to educate their professionals. This can range from imparting job-specific technical skills to acquiring civilian education to advanced education in staff and war
The staff and war colleges play a vital role in allowing officers to understand new challenges and provide crucibles for the study of new military missions. Clearly the more that a nation's staff and war colleges emphasize stability and peacekeeping operations, to include intervention in failed states, the better prepared their military will be to undertake such missions. Coalition capabilities can be augmented by exchanges between militaries, attendance at the staff or war college of another nation, seminars, conferences and staff talks, and combined wargames and exercises.†

Concept and doctrine development takes place in war and staff colleges, "battle labs," and, in some cases, in military commands or staff colleges specifically designed for this purpose. The U.S. Army, for instance, has a Training and Doctrine Command led by a four star general. The more that military concept and doctrine development organizations work with the problem of intervention in failed states, the more mature the concepts and doctrine which guide such operations. Training ranges from normal garrison activities to large scale field exercises. The U.S. military uses the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana and the Combat Maneuver Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany for this type of training exercises.³ Further development of large-scale multinational training centers for stability operations including intervention in failed states would be particularly useful. Finally, there is little technology development focused specifically on intervention in failed states. There have been some

* In most nations, selected officers attend staff college somewhere between their 8th and 18th year of service, and war college some time after the 15th year of service. In the U.S. Army, an officer would be eligible for staff college at the 12-14 year mark in their career (while a senior level captain or major), and for war college at the 20-22 year mark (while a senior level lieutenant colonel or junior level colonel). The militaries of advanced states often have equivalent schools for their senior noncommissioned officers.
† A "combined" exercise involves two or more countries. A "joint" exercise involves two or more services of the same country.

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attempts to remedy this. For instance, in 2001 the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency undertook a major study entitled "All Our Tomorrows" to identify technology requirements for a wide range of security challenges, including intervention in failed states. The degree to which this results in funded research and development, though, remains to be seen.

The U.S. Military and Intervention in Failed States.

Where the George Bush and Clinton administrations saw failed states from a humanitarian perspective, the George W. Administration has focused on the threats to the United States that might emerge from ungoverned areas. For instance, the 2002 Annual Report to the President and Congress by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated,

The absence of capable or responsible governments in many countries in wide areas of Asia, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere creates a fertile ground for non-state actors to engage in terrorism, acquisition of NBC weapons, illegal drug trafficking, and other illicit activities across state borders. A terrorist underworld including such groups as al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Jaish-I-Mohammed operates in such areas. In an era of catastrophic terrorism, the United States cannot afford to ignore the anarchy that threatens a number of regions of the world.

In several regions, the inability of some states to govern their societies, safeguard their military armaments, and prevent their territories from serving as sanctuary to terrorists and criminal organizations poses a threat to stability and places demands on U.S. forces. Afghanistan is but one example of the security implications for the U.S. of such weak or ungoverned areas. Conditions in some states, including some with nuclear weapons, demonstrate that threats can grow out of the weakness of governments as much as out of their strength.4

The Bush Administration's defense policy has four priority goals: 1) assuring allies and friends; 2) dissuading future military competition; 3) deterring threats and coercion against U.S. interests; and 4) if deterrence fails, decisively defeating any adversary.5 It clearly will intervene...
in failed states or ungoverned areas that might serve as a base for international terrorism. When this happens, American might even lead efforts at reconstruction. In Afghanistan, for instance, the United States is involved in training local security forces and economic reconstruction. State Department officials have been teamed with military Special Forces to, in the words of Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, "help mediate disputes, smooth over conflicts and play an unheralded but pivotal role in supporting Afghanistan's political equilibrium." After the September 2002 attempt to assassinate Afghan leader Hamid Karzai, Administration officials suggested a broader and longer U.S. involvement in that country. It is not clear, though, that humanitarian disasters, even genocide that are not related to terrorism would inspire an equal effort. Nothing that Bush Administration officials have said indicates that they would not participate in such an intervention, but nothing they have said suggests that they would either.

Whether under Clinton or Bush, the preference on the part of the U.S. military and policymakers is that the U.S. participate in the preparation, deployment, and initial entry phases of an intervention, but that other nations with a more direct interest in the failed state and with fewer global security commitments bear the main responsibility for consolidation, reconstruction, and handover. The rationale is that this is the most logical division of labor given the extent of America's security responsibilities and the fact that all failed states to date have taken place in areas of peripheral interest to the United States (although, as Rumsfeld admits, "the events of September 11 have demonstrated, the geographic position of the United States will not provide immunity from direct attack on its people, territory, or infrastructure" which may change the assessment of the risk posed by a failed state).
Should American leaders decide to intervene in a failed state in the future, the transformation which the U.S. military is undertaking today will make it an even more effective tool. This is particularly true of the Army which would bear the brunt of any intervention in a failed state. Army Transformation will lead to a more agile and deployable force. Within a decade the Army will be able to deploy a brigade combat team anywhere in the world 96 hours after liftoff, a division on the ground in 120 hours, and five divisions in theater in 30 days. Such a capability could very useful in the face of an unfolding humanitarian disaster. Whether the future U.S. military will retain the ability to operate in a complex multinational coalition and undertake reconstruction as well as initial entry and, in a broader sense, whether intervention in failed states will remain a component of U.S. strategy remains to be seen.

Conclusions.

Successful military intervention in a failed states requires participant nations that have both the will and capacity to undertake it. At the present time, the United States has the capacity to do so, but may not have the will. African nations have the will but have serious liabilities, particularly in terms of mobility, logistics, and intelligence. Other states, particularly Europe, Canada, and Australia, fall somewhere in between. Their will is greater than the United States, but their capabilities are greater than those of Africa.

In the broadest sense, two major questions remain about multinational military intervention in failed states. The first is whether an intervening force can sustain the will to see an operation through the reconstruction and handover phases. It will not be hard to cobble together a multinational force to stop a raging humanitarian disaster, but to keep one together for

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years or even decades will always be difficult. The second question is whether a successful intervention could be undertaken if the failed state were a middle level one like Pakistan, Indonesia, or Nigeria, or even a major one like Russia, China, or India. Admittedly, such a disaster is unlikely, but not unthinkable. Somalia, Afghanistan, or even the Democratic Republic of Congo would be dwarfed by the failure of one of these giants.

After a decade of involvement in multinational peacekeeping most advanced militaries and even many less advanced ones of the tools and procedures for effective stability operations, including intervention in failed states. If anything, these capabilities are likely to increase in coming years. National will, though, particularly the will to undertake long term reconstruction of a failed state remains the great unknown.
Notes


5 Ibid., p. 17.


