

Sulaiman, Saadia. *Post-conflict reconstruction: From Extremism to Peaceful Co-existence.*

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Post-Conflict Reconstruction provides a nuanced analysis of the multidimensional factors underlying state fragility and extremism. The book treats state fragility as a composite phenomenon consisting of “security, political, socio-economic and external factors.” These factors manifest as five major features of “persistent security dilemma, dysfunctional economy, institutional weakness and legitimacy crisis, inability to manage change and space for external interference.” The book provides a deep study of the correlation between state fragility and violent extremism with respect to six country cases, viz., Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Yemen. Although, the author identifies three types of state fragility based upon the absence of one of the three major state competencies, namely, “authority, legitimacy and capacity,” yet the reality of state fragility in terms of the country cases discussed turns out to be more variegated than the three-minus-one forms of state fragility. The author’s critical treatment of these country cases throws up some intriguing insights into the nature and mechanism of state fragility.

First, the analysis shows that there is no single set path to state fragility. As there are usually different routes that lead into any town, so there are different ways in which a state can become fragile. The six country cases in a way represent six different roads to state fragility. Other possible pathways to state fragility may in fact be much more numerous. Capturing this diversity in a robust theoretical manner, despite the inherent and recognized fluidity of the concept of state fragility, is certainly a strong suit of the book.

Second, it can be deduced from the analysis that exogenous factors primarily and endogenous factors secondarily led to the state fragility in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. In the case of Nigeria and Pakistan, endogenous factors played a

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primary role and exogenous factors played a secondary role in creating conditions of fragility. The book demonstrates that the six different trajectories of state fragility have consisted of varying proportions of internal and external factors within the overall endogenous-exogenous matrix. This matrix produces fertile conditions for the incubation of extremism in fragile state environments. Extremist elements become adept at adapting their disruptive strategy to the particular variant of state fragility in which they find themselves. They become skilled at the manipulation of the underlying combinations and differential proportions of the five key factors of state fragility. What this essentially means is the simultaneous escalation of some attributes of fragility and de-escalation of other attributes with the overall result that the ability of the state to deploy all three of its key competencies for good governance becomes or remains consistently diminished. The book shows violent conflict as the strategic terrain in which state fragility is utilized and further aggravated by extremist elements.

Third, the book presents state fragility in geographically and geostrategically diverse terms. Three out of six fragile states studied in the book fall in the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) regional security complex, two belong in the South Asian regional security complex, and one lies within the West African segment of the Sub-Saharan security complex. These six countries are either middle or small powers; they have also historically tended to be geostrategically located but geopolitically volatile states. All except Pakistan and Yemen also possess abundant strategic natural resources. These states have equally been important from the standpoint of great-power competition by virtue of their critical geoeconomic or geostrategic endowments. The book, however, does not draw an explicit correlation between state fragility of middle or small powers and exigencies of great-power competition.

Fourth, based on the author's analysis, two types of state fragility can be inferred, that is, high state fragility (Type 1) and low state fragility (Type 2). High state fragility is the

condition in which all five or four key features of state fragility may be present in an advanced form. Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen seem to suffer from Type 1 state fragility. Low state fragility is the condition in which three or less than three attributes may be present in an advanced form or in which five or four key attributes may be at work in an attenuated or manageable form. It appears from the analysis that Nigeria and Pakistan may be classed as Type 2 fragile states. Pakistan is itself designated as an “outlier” implying that its fragility is not as high or advanced as that of Afghanistan or Yemen.

Fifth, the fragility trap is discussed as a historical, and, therefore, reversible condition rather than a permanent and irreversible one. While the author recognizes the path dependence of the fragility trap, yet she admirably stays clear of the fallacy of reification. Viewing state fragility, as the author does, as stemming, among other things, out of an explosive combination of the persistence of colonialism’s legacy of marginalization and exploitation and the continuing postcolonial poor governance, naturally leads one to think hard about remediation. The author shows that it is possible for states to climb out of the fragility trap just as they once were constrained to slide into it. She is equally awake to the odds of states’ relapse into fragility.

Sixth, the book cautions that escaping state fragility and undertaking post-conflict reconstruction is a task fraught with many challenges, but just as there may be multiple pathways to state fragility, so there may be more than one way to post-conflict reconstruction. The author suggests that reconstruction has the best chance of succeeding if it is not a “knee-jerk reaction.” This can be done if it is understood that “a state becomes fragile through a ‘Process’” so any effort at reconstruction, whether indigenous or inspired by international intervention, should be sensitive both to the process whereby a state becomes locked in the fragility trap and to the conditions which cause the continuation and persistence of conflict. A gradualist and integrated approach, therefore, has perhaps the

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best chance of being effective. This requires simultaneously addressing the five sources or attributes of state fragility and consolidating the three major competencies of state. In this regard, the importance of gauging differential combinations and proportions of these attributes should be understood precisely for any country-specific reconstruction effort to be successful.

While it does not detract by any manner of means from the merit of the book and the quality of its analysis, one does wish that the author had perhaps discussed the historicity of the phenomenon of state fragility in a more global context and shown that those states that are now considered exemplars of stability have also suffered from the fragility trap in the past, such as the United States during the American Civil War (1861-1865), England during the English Civil War (1642-1651), Germany during the interwar period (1919-1939), Occupied France during the Second World War (1940-1945), Russia from the Russian Revolution of 1905 till the end of the Russian Civil War in 1922, and China from the First Opium War in 1839 till the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Hopefully, in future, the author may perhaps build upon the meritorious work she has produced on state fragility, extremism, and post-conflict reconstruction, and may essay just such an analysis which also shows how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted fragile states in a global context.

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