

# State building in the post-post-Cold War world

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May 1, 2020

## Session 1 remarks

- Our current thinking and policy approaches to state building in fragile states are a product of a particular phase of the post-1945 UN nation-state system – a post-Cold War period marked by high levels of US and western European influence in international institutions and in many of the most “fragile” states.
- This period is now coming to an end.
- A post-post-Cold War period<sup>1</sup> is coming into view, characterized by
  1. *Increased major power competition and friction, and increased competition among regional powers.* As a result:
    - UN-system and other international institutions are less able to coordinate and organize third-party efforts to state build within the formally agreed boundaries and according to prior norms.
    - A bit similar to Cold War dynamics, personalist rulers of fragile states and their local competitors can take advantage of major power and regional-rival divisions to extract resources and support for proxy wars and personalist rule that is antithetical to welfare-improving institution building.
  2. *The spread of state collapse and major armed conflict to the MENA region.* This has further undermined and rendered less relevant the post-CW “treatment regime” (Stedman and Gowan 2017) for fragile and conflict-affected states. At the same time, state collapse and major armed conflict in this region has much larger negative externalities for Europe and the rest of the world than did some of the main conflict areas of the 1990s, when the treatment regime developed.

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<sup>1</sup>Would like a better name.

- For several reasons, conflict and state collapse in the MENA region is highly resistant to the model of third-party peacekeeping operations-plus-aid that defined the post-Cold War treatment regime. The international community’s standard post-Cold War tools are not very applicable or useful for Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan.
  - Larger negative externalities: Massive refugee flows to Europe; transnational terrorism; instability in energy markets; potential acquisition of WMD by terrorists.
3. *Greatly reduced willingness of OECD country publics to engage in or even pay for boots-on-the-ground PKO and other interventions with state building aspirations.*
- In Session 6 (“Meddling by foreign powers that undermines state building”) I develop more of an argument about the implications of these three post-post-Cold War conditions for state building (and state disintegration) in fragile states.
  - In this opening session, I just wanted to make a pitch for us to engage directly with the implications of a changed international environment in our discussions.
  - The post-Cold War environment allowed a theoretical and practical discourse to develop that imagines the problem of state building as if it were purely about designing and fostering optimal *domestic* political and economic institutions, and social norms, for fragile states.
  - But if power-holders in fragile states
    - do not themselves have an interest in building institutions that can challenge, threaten, and outlive them;
    - have alternative sources of support from competing regional and major power rivals;
    - on, in other cases, have no support because the rich countries’ interest in paying to shore up the store-front facades of the more Potemkin parts of the UN General Assembly has greatly diminished;

then we may need to reconsider both the post-Cold War discourse and the policy instruments it focused on.

- Likewise, what if Somalia was a bellwether? What if, for a slowly growing number of formal UN “states” like DRC, Yemen, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, and Honduras (?), coherent rule by an organization that approximates a monopoly of legitimate violence based in a capitol is not in the cards, given current domestic and international conditions?