Governments Against States: The Logic of Self-Destructive Despotism

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Abstract. Although state failure has assumed considerable importance in the post-cold-war world, attempts to predict its occurrence statistically have not been very successful. Such attempts rely on off-the-shelf data collected for other purposes. To predict state failure, we need data more specific to the problem. A better body of theory is required to identify causal patterns, and case studies are a promising way to proceed. Case studies of paradigmatic state failures in Somalia and Afghanistan suggest a pattern: rulers attack the state apparatus in order to prevent opposition by the bureaucracy and military, precipitating the collapse of the state.

Keywords: • Civil service • Military • Militias • State failure

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The study of state failure and collapse has become a field in its own right only recently. Earlier research programs certainly touched on these issues, but focused on different problems: the causes of revolution and civil war, the effects of corruption and black markets, the abuse of human rights, and the factors that lead to, and interfere with, economic development. It is only since the end of the cold war, and especially since 9/11, that state failure has become a field of inquiry with a literature of its own.

Like most new fields, the theory of state failure is sparse and underdeveloped. Yet there is significant policy pressure to generate accurate predictions of state failure, and this has led to attempts to model the phenomenon using readily available data not generated specifically for the purpose. Indeed, given the weakly developed theoretical literature, it is difficult to determine a priori exactly what data would be useful.

The statistical analysis of predictors of state collapse is still in its infancy. The most thorough effort to date is that of the Political Instability Task Force (PITF, originally the State Failure Task Force or SFTF), a body formed by the United States

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Central Intelligence Agency to develop a model of risk factors for state failure that would inform US government decisions about foreign aid and intervention. The PITF has engaged in an impressive data-collection effort, and mined the data using a variety of algorithms.

Statistical models of state failure and collapse such as those developed by the PITF are, however, handicapped by a lack of appropriate data and the poorly developed state of the theoretical literature. They are limited to off-the-shelf data which are not causally very closely related to the events they hope to explain. Furthermore, given the lack of theoretical guidance, they are constrained to perform data-mining operations rather than more theoretically guided probes of hypotheses.

Of course, any statistical analysis of state failure and collapse will have its limits: it will necessarily be probabilistic, rather than diagnostic. It will not signal imminent collapse, but rather a heightened risk of collapse. Many countries with elevated risk limp along indefinitely, chronically weak or failing, but not quite collapsing.[1] However, it is likely that the attempt to quantify the analysis of state failure was made too soon, without an adequate theoretical basis. Even if correspondences are found in the existing data, it would remain to explain them and to determine what exactly the relevant variables are proxying. Theoretical and case-study work can suggest new and more promising variables for cross-national data collection, as well as suggesting how variables might fit together in a causal pattern.

This article seeks to address these issues by outlining one set of risk factors suggested by two cases of total state collapse: Afghanistan and Somalia. In both cases, state collapse was precipitated in part by government attacks on the state apparatus. This may seem odd, because studies of the developing world seldom make the distinction between governments and the state apparatus. The distinction is commonly made in studies of democratic politics in the industrially developed countries, where it would be considered an amateurish mistake to assume that the elected government and the professional bureaucracy are identical or share the same interests and preferences. However, it assumes special importance in failing states.

When failing states collapse, the agent of the state's destruction is frequently a government desperate to sustain its power in the short run. Typically, such governments lack a strong popular base to sustain themselves, and sacrifice core state institutions to purchase political loyalty from key constituencies. Sometimes this strategy can be sustained indefinitely, especially if resources such as mineral wealth or foreign aid are available. However, in some cases such equilibria may not be found, or may be later disturbed, leading to more serious attacks on the state apparatus. At the extreme, such self-destructive despotisms may arm the very enemies that eventually bring them down, hoping to play them off against each other for short-term survival. The result in such cases can be a catastrophic collapse of the state. While such behavior seems bizarre and counterintuitive at first, there is a logic to it.

Below, I first discuss in greater detail the limits of statistical forecasts of state failure. I develop case studies of Somalia and Afghanistan to provide a basis for theorizing about government attacks on the state. I then discuss the logic of self-destructive despotism in order to draw out some of the theoretical implications of the cases studied. While two cases chosen on the dependent variable certainly

cannot provide proof that these dynamics are present in all collapses, it can be shown how such dynamics are theoretically plausible as at least one route to state collapse. To enhance the plausibility of the argument, references to other cases are inserted in this section, although they are necessarily brief. I conclude with a discussion of the kind of data that could be collected to provide a stronger quantitative basis to test my argument, and to predict state failure.

The Statistical Analysis of State Failure and its Limits

The SFTF and PITF have proceeded through four phases. The PITF recently released phase-IV results, which predict with a much greater degree of accuracy than did the phase-III results. Unfortunately, it has not yet released complete data for phase IV, making a full analysis impossible. Instead, I focus here on the phase-III results, referring to the phase-IV results where possible. In phase III, the SFTF developed a simple model of state failure employing only three variables: democracy (most democratic regimes are transitional, and as such are more likely to fail), trade as a proportion of GDP (countries less open to trade are more likely to fail), and infant mortality (presumably regarding this as a proxy for economic development, countries with high infant mortality are more likely to fail) (Political Instability Task Force, 2003; State Failure Task Force, 2000).

One difficulty faced by the PITF or by a similar statistical approach is that state collapse is a rare event. By definition it is difficult to extract much information from events that occur rarely. While the PITF and others have employed appropriate statistical techniques for the study of rare events,[2] in this case the problem is compounded because state failures tend to occur within a set of countries that look very similar by most quantitative measures. Failed states are not very distinctive among the less developed countries on most standard statistical measures. There are a great many countries that resemble failed states on many measures, but do not collapse. The combination of the rare events problem and the lack of distinctive characteristics presents a formidable challenge to the study of state failure and collapse.

TABLE 1. *King and Zeng's Forecasts of State Failure*

Highest probability of failure (failure observed)			Highest probability of failure (non-failure observed)		
Senegal	1991	.5307	Peru	1998	.5955
Kyrgyzstan	1995	.4563	Bangladesh	1996	.4841
Kazakhstan	1995	.4147	Kyrgyzstan	1993	.4781
Cambodia	1997	.4122	Kyrgyzstan	1994	.4752
Georgia	1998	.3913	St. Kitts and Nevis	1997	.4570
Armenia	1994	.3470	Uzbekistan	1991	.4394
Guinea-Bissau	1998	.3214	Bangladesh	1995	.4355
Thailand	1991	.2787	Kyrgyzstan	1997	.4187
Zambia	1996	.2348	Guinea-Bissau	1996	.4110
Georgia	1991	.2285	San Marino	1998	.4006
		Mean = .3616			Mean = .4599

Source: King and Zeng (2001b).

King and Zeng (2001b) provide a useful example of the problem in their sophisticated re-analysis of the SFTF phase-III results. Although they are able to improve significantly on the SFTF's forecasts, they are still far from being accurate. For instance, Table 1 displays King and Zeng's predictions of the 10 states most likely to collapse in the 1990s which did so, and the 10 that did not. Among the 10 states predicted to be the most likely to collapse that actually did so the mean probability of collapse was .3616. Yet the mean probability of collapse among the 10 cases that were predicted most likely to collapse, but did not do so, was .4599. In other words, the states that did not collapse had a higher mean risk rating than the ones that did. If policymakers used these probabilities to intervene in the 10 states most likely to collapse, they would have selected eight cases that did not, in the event, collapse, and only two that did. They would also have missed eight cases that did collapse. Correctly predicting two is better than having no basis on which to make a prediction, but there is clearly room for improvement.[3]

This is not a critique of King and Zeng, or of the PITF. They have done admirable work collecting and analyzing data on an intractable issue. However, it highlights the intrinsic difficulties of forecasting state failure.

The problem can be illustrated by comparing failed states to other non-OECD countries (see Table 2). Failed states are on average somewhat "worse" than other less developed countries on all three measures: they are slightly more democratic, somewhat less open to trade, and have a somewhat higher infant mortality rate. However, the differences are modest. Furthermore, in no case does the set of failed states include the worst-scoring country among the non-OECD states. In other words, failed states are in bad shape, but there are developing countries that are even worse off, and do not collapse. Nor are the failed states even located very far out on the tails of the distribution of any of these variables. The difference between the mean values for trade as a proportion of GDP among the failed states and the other non-OECD states is not even significant. It is significant for democracy and infant mortality, but even here the difference is not very large. For all three variables, the mean value for the failed states is within one standard deviation of the mean value for all non-OECD states. On average, the failed states are toward the center of the distribution, not the extremes. Statistically, the failed states are not very different from the universe of non-OECD states.

Thus, there appears to be something about state failure that statistical analysis of existing data does not capture. There are at least two possibilities. One is that

TABLE 2. *SFTF Failed States Compared to Other Non-OECD Countries*

	Other non-OECD states				State failures			
	Mean	Min	Max	Std Dev	Mean	Min	Max	Std Dev
Democracy (Polity IV)	–2.12	–10.00	10.00	6.84	–0.66*	–7.00	7.00	2.27
Trade as a proportion of GDP	68.94	1.53	361.18	41.40	57.78	18.60	143.03	34.12
Infant mortality	69.31	2.90	293.00	51.98	105.81**	20.00	182.00	52.92

Notes: * Difference of means significant at $p \geq .05$
** Difference of means significant at $p \geq .01$
Table shows mean values for all states coded failures by the PITF and for all other non-OECD states for years 1960–2004.
Sources: World Bank, Polity IV, SFTF.

there is some factor common to state failures that is not captured in the data. If this is true, it seems likely that no data exist to capture that factor, given the comprehensiveness of the PITF's data-collection efforts. I have certainly been unable to find any new variable that improves on its forecasting.

A second possibility is that state failures are not very similar. It could be that, to paraphrase Tolstoy, functional states are all the same, but failing states each fail in their own way. There may be something to this point: the PITF's definition of state failure is extremely broad, including revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, genocides, "politicides," and "adverse or disruptive regime transitions" (abrupt and unplanned shifts in patterns of governance, including, but not limited to, state collapse).[4] This broad definition is designed to follow the guidelines set out for the PITF by policymakers. The change in the name of the task force from "State Failure" to "Political Instability" appears to reflect a recognition that the majority of events included in the dependent variable are not those that most people think of as state failure. The more diverse dependent variable has the advantage of increasing the number of events to analyze. However, the cost of increasing the number of cases is a dependent variable that is highly heterogeneous, and possibly incoherent.[5]

If we isolate the most severe form of state failure (the collapse of the institutions of government) from others, the only statistic that becomes more telling is infant mortality. Table 3 shows summary statistics for the SFTF phase-III variables for the subset of states in which there was a failure of state authority in all or a substantial part of the country, or in the capital city.[6] These collapsed states are actually closer to the mean for the other non-OECD states than the failed states on the democracy and trade variables. Only for infant mortality are the collapsed states significantly worse than the other non-OECD countries, and this time the difference is just outside one standard deviation from the mean. Disaggregating the collapsed states from the other failures yields only a modest improvement over the more heterogeneous definition of state failure.[7]

To sort out the differences between collapsed states, failing states, and merely weak ones, we need to develop better theory to know what to look for. In this respect, comparative case-study analysis can be especially helpful. It can illuminate causal factors shared by failed states that may not be captured by the available data,

TABLE 3. *SFTF Collapsed States Compared to Other Non-OECD Countries*

	Other non-OECD states				State collapses			
	Mean	Min	Max	Std Dev	Mean	Min	Max	Std Dev
Democracy (Polity IV)	–2.11	–10.00	10.00	6.81	–1.04	–7.00	5.00	2.87
Trade as a proportion of GDP	68.81	1.53	361.18	41.35	68.44	20.44	161.21	39.89
Infant mortality	69.31	2.90	293.00	51.86	122.02**	16.00	183.80	55.05

Notes: * Difference of means significant at $p \geq .05$

** Difference of means significant at $p \geq .01$

Table shows mean values for all states coded as experiencing adverse regime transitions at level two and higher by the PITF, and for all other non-OECD states, for years 1960–2004.

Sources: World Bank, Polity IV, SFTF.

and help determine whether the cases are simply so different that it is unreasonable to look for common factors.

Case studies can be especially valuable for exploratory work and theory building (Eckstein, 1992; Gerring, 2006). This is exactly the kind of work the state-failure literature needs at this point. In-depth examination of a limited number of cases can elucidate causal connections and generate hypotheses without the severe data constraints that can hamper cross-national work. Where standardized, quantitative, cross-national data do not exist, case studies can permit the exploratory examination of new variables to determine if they might make plausible candidates for more systematic data collection. In this spirit, I examine two paradigmatic cases of total state collapse: Afghanistan and Somalia.

Case Studies: Somalia and Afghanistan

In both Somalia and Afghanistan, the state collapsed utterly. Afghanistan lacked any central government between 1992 and 1996, and arguably is only now beginning to reconstruct the state apparatus. In Somalia, the state collapsed in 1991, and, as of writing, no one has seriously attempted to rehabilitate it, except in the secessionist northern region known as Somaliland. In both cases, we will see that the strategies of rulers to cling to power precipitated total collapse in what might otherwise have been merely chronically weak or failing states.

Somalia

Clan is often blamed for the collapse of the Somali state, but, as Laitin (1999) points out, clan has been a constant in Somali culture for centuries. Clan certainly had a role in the way the collapse of the state played out, but other events precipitated that collapse. The clan system actually unites Somalis in a single mythic genealogy, descended from a common ancestor. Well in excess of 90 percent of the population is ethnically Somali, sharing the same religion, language, and customs. However, Somali clans exist in a constant competitive dynamic that was functional in an environment of extreme resource scarcity.

Traditional mechanisms of dispute resolution by clan elders constrained violence among close kin, but weakened as agnatic connections became more distant. Among very distantly related people there was virtually no sanction on the use of violence. Thus, in-group solidarity was promoted and out-group violence was permitted.[8]

This competitive dynamic undermined a short-lived democratic regime in Somalia (1961–9). The importance of kinship led to a proliferation of small parties based on lineage segments, often running a single candidate. However, to participate in the spoils, one had to be a member of the winning party. Thus, after each election representatives defected to the government party en masse. In the last election (March 1969), only one opposition member remained at the end of this process (Lewis, 2002: 179). Somalia thus had the unique distinction of democratically producing a one-party state. Yet this overwhelming numerical superiority merely paralyzed the governing party, the Somali Youth League (SYL). The leadership found it impossible to deal with conflicting factions contained within the party.

Given the paralysis and corruption of the parliamentary government, the 1969 coup that brought Siyaad Barre to power was initially welcomed by many Somalis.

The new regime promised to right the wrongs of the parliamentary government: to reduce corruption, eliminate "tribalism" (meaning clan politics), improve bureaucratic efficiency, extend education, and bring economic development.

The new government was able to act more decisively than the parliamentary government precisely because it did not need to worry about balancing competing factions. Siyaad initially appeared to govern on the basis of merit rather than clan. As a member of the relatively small Marehan clan, this was a strategy that made sense for him, but it also had resonance and appeal for many Somalis disgusted with the spectacle of the democratic period, especially urbanites. "Tribalism" was buried in effigy. The common question used by Somalis to locate each other socially, "What is your clan?," was outlawed.[9] Traditional modes of conflict management, including the payment of blood money, were forbidden. Instead of pursuing private vengeance, people were compelled to address their grievances through the legal system. This weakened the authority of clan elders, who had traditionally conducted dispute resolution. These policies initially reduced the level of social violence and instituted something closer to a state monopoly of the use of force than Somalia had ever seen, even under colonial administration (Galaydh, 1990: 10–11).

However, a regime built on egalitarian principles inevitably meant that clans privileged under the parliamentary system suffered relative losses under Siyaad. Siyaad's attempt to eradicate the clan from Somali politics may have stemmed from genuine nationalist conviction, the political calculations of a member of a relatively weak clan, or cynical manipulation intended to obfuscate a quiet promotion of Marehan interests. Regardless of the reason, the clans that had dominated the parliamentary system were inevitably eclipsed. As David Laitin (1982: 61) wrote at the time:

> Egalitarian policies necessarily appear discriminatory to groups that had been in the previous period the leading social strata. Their leaders interpreted their relative decline as persecution, and they sought to undermine Siyaad. Siyaad found himself fighting clan-based opposition by relying ever more for protection on members of his own clan. This was interpreted by the opposition as proof that Siyaad was a tribalist.[10]

The military government was able to pursue policies designed to reshape society not only because of its improved administrative effectiveness, but also because it was to a great extent autonomous from society. This autonomy was underwritten by continued foreign aid. Aid permitted the government to operate without negotiating with its own population regarding taxation (Samatar, 1987; Samatar, 1990: 121; Samatar and Samatar, 1987: 684–7). This gave Siyaad's government freedom to undertake unpopular policies without regard for public opinion. For instance, in 1988 the government completed upgrades to the port of Kismayo, which gave export cattle better access to safe drinking water than the local human population had, a policy that was possible because the funds came from foreign donors rather than local taxpayers (Little, 1996: 48). At the same time, foreign funding allowed the government to be extremely opaque, promoting corruption and secretive policymaking. This opacity fueled speculation and rumor: since people lacked concrete information about the decision-making procedures of the regime, they were forced to construct explanations for unpopular policies with the materials at hand. Such speculation almost inevitably came to rely on the key organizing

principle of Somali society: clan. Even though the Siyaad Barre regime was able to outlaw some manifestations of clan and lineage organization, it was unable to eradicate clan as a core cultural concept. "Tribalism" remained available as a ready tool to interpret government policy in an environment where little hard evidence was available (Simons, 1995: 51).

The increasingly embattled regime clearly understood its legitimacy was declining. In response, it developed totalitarian tendencies. A personality cult was created around Siyaad Barre. In 1972, the government formed a paramilitary organization, the "Victorious Pioneers" (*Guulwadayaal*), to conduct surveillance at the local level. Families and neighbors were encouraged to spy on each other, and a song titled "Your Shadow is Watching You" was promoted to discourage unapproved behavior (Issa-Salwe, 1994: 58–9). Political opponents and even allies were jailed for long periods or executed without trial (Hassan, 1980).

In addition to cracking down on dissent, Siyaad Barre attempted to rally support using popular nationalist causes. Chief among these was the unification of all Somalis in a single state. The Somali people had been divided by colonialism, but were briefly united during World War II when the British took control of the Italian colonies of Somalia and Ethiopia and Vichy French Djibouti. Added to British Kenya and Somaliland, these conquests brought all Somalis under a single authority. After the war, however, all these colonies reverted to their former masters, bitterly crushing nationalist hopes that they would remain united.

In 1977, at a moment when Somalia enjoyed Soviet patronage and Ethiopia was internally weakened by Mengistu's coup against Haile Selassie, Siyaad Barre decided to launch an offensive against the Ethiopian region of the Ogaden. The Ogaden was home to many Somalis of his mother's clan, the Darood. The offensive was initially successful and extremely popular in Somalia. However, it turned out to be a massive miscalculation. The Soviets found themselves supplying both sides in the war, and when their attempts to mediate failed, they sided not with their old allies the Somalis, but with their new ones the Ethiopians. Soviet equipment and advisers and Cuban troops flooded into Ethiopia, routing the Somalis.

In addition to the embarrassment of losing the war and the physical destruction of much of the Somali army, the defeat triggered a sequence of events that increased opposition to Siyaad. Darood refugees from Ethiopia flooded into the northern part of Somalia, dominated by the Isaaq clan. Local Isaaqs perceived these refugees as receiving better treatment from the government than they did, and this was interpreted as being due to the fact that they belonged to Siyaad's mother's clan. In response, disaffected Isaaq army officers formed the first armed opposition movement to Siyaad, the Somali National Movement. A number of other armed opposition groups were formed shortly thereafter, most notably the Hawiye-based United Somali Congress (USC).

Facing increasing challenges and shrinking resources due to the loss of Soviet aid,[11] Siyaad Barre's time horizons began to shrink: short-term survival increasingly came to dominate policy. Siyaad began to defend his power through short-term strategies that included attacking the state in order to neutralize potential centers of opposition. Loyal military officers had been inserted into the bureaucracy from the beginning of Siyaad's rule in 1969. The civil service was purged repeatedly of bureaucrats whose loyalty was suspect, at first on the basis of their commitment to the revolution, and later on the basis of clan (Colletta and Cullen, 2000: 58; Issa-Salwe, 1994: 67; "Mahamoud," 1981: 8–9).

Clan increasingly became the key organizing principle of the regime, undermining the rational meritocracy Siyaad had promised to introduce. As Siyaad sought to reinforce his own power against the opposition, the *nomenklatura* system introduced under Soviet influence began to evolve into what Hussein Adam (1995: 72) has dubbed "clan-klatura": "placing trusted clansmen and other loyalists in positions of power, wealth, [and] control/espionage." Meanwhile, the real value of civil service salaries began to sink due to inflation, by 1989 measuring only 3 percent of their value in the 1970s. Rampant corruption and absenteeism was the result, and the delivery of basic government services collapsed (Mubarak, 1997: 2028). The government rapidly lost the ability to control economic policy, and most economic activity shifted into informal markets, further undermining the state's capacity to collect information and taxes (Besteman, 1999: 203; Mubarak, 1997: 2029; Simons, 1995: 197).

Lacking a sufficient number of literate Marehan-clan supporters with which to pack the civil service, the second-best strategy for Siyaad was to let it fail. The collapse of the civil service removed a potential site of resistance and enhanced Siyaad's options for unchallenged despotic rule, at least in the short term.

As the state's capacity to deliver basic services, including security, diminished, people turned to alternative suppliers. Strong class, regional, and urban–rural cleavages existed, but lineage had the advantage of providing a ready-made infrastructure: it represented social capital that could easily be put to work. Furthermore, lineage was the primary means for interpreting the complex and confusing events that marked the decline of the regime (Simons, 1995: 196–7). Lineage remained a stable cognitive tool amid the confusion, a refuge and the primary organizing principle for opposition to Siyaad.

As people retreated into lineage networks, a vicious cycle was triggered: seeking protection within clans stimulated the old dynamic of clan competition. This destroyed any potential for class-based or rural mobilization against the government. A united front against the regime became increasingly unlikely. Conflict and violence along clan lines restricted people to clan-based forms of protection.

Siyaad exploited this phenomenon for his own purposes, inflaming disputes and facilitating the formation of clan-based militias to disunite potential opposition coalitions. He armed some groups, encouraged them to attack others, and then armed the victims to enable them to retaliate. He was thus able to keep potential opposition disunited, fending off direct challenges to his own power by sacrificing the state's control of violence (Compagnon, 1998: 76).

By creating well-armed clan militias, however, Siyaad precipitated the collapse of the state. As clan conflict spiraled out of control, he became just one more warlord. He had the advantage of controlling the capital and the perquisites of sovereign recognition by other countries. However, he suffered the disadvantages of coming from a relatively small and weak clan. When he was overthrown by the Hawiye-based USC in 1991, there was virtually nothing left of the Somali state. The remnants of the civil service were forced to seek protection from clan warlords. The competing warring factions armed by Siyaad formed a perfect balance-of-power system, allying to prevent any one faction from becoming hegemonic. Siyaad not only destroyed the state, but also made it impossible for anyone else to rebuild it.

Afghanistan

As in Somalia, political leaders in Afghanistan took a weak state and turned it into a catastrophic collapse. Unlike Somalia, where a single individual clearly bears a large portion of the blame, in Afghanistan three successive governments presided over the dissolution of the state. The first, the Khalq faction of the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), initiated the process by seriously overreaching the capacities of the state and engendering widespread resistance. Two successors, installed and backed by the Soviet Union, both exacerbated the problem by arming militias of uncertain loyalty, which eventually turned on and destroyed the central government.

The Khalq faction of the PDPA had an ambitious plan for social revolution that appears at first glance to be a classic high-modernist program for the state-led transformation of society (Scott, 1998). If the state apparatus had been stronger, it might have been that. In practice, the plan overstressed an already fragile administrative system, leading to the destruction of what capacity it did possess.

Khalq goals required centralizing power and eliminating potential competitors. This included eradicating bureaucratic opposition through a purge of government officials inherited from the previous regime, and destroying local reservoirs of power and authority. A program of rural reforms was central to the latter process. It attacked the cultural and financial resources that enabled local leaders to build followings capable of resisting the central government by regulating debts and mortgages, outlawing the practices of arranged marriage and bride price, creating farmers' cooperatives, and conducting a propagandistic literacy campaign (Arnold, 1994: 40–1; Roy, 1990: 86–97; Rubin, 2002: 116). The centerpiece was a land reform meant to dispossess local leaders. Immediately after the 1978 coup, hundreds of thousands of peasants were awarded land confiscated from wealthy rural landowners. However, no provision was made for water rights, credit, obtaining seed, using draft animals and machinery, or the other myriad services landlords had provided in addition to land. Furthermore, the new government did not have the administrative resources to guarantee possession to the new ostensible owners of the land. Under the old regime, property relations had not generally fallen under state authority, so the PDPA lacked even the basic land records required to make the reform work (Arnold, 1985: 109; Rubin, 2002: 117–19). In addition, there was little documentation of debts and other financial transactions which were the subject of reform programs.

The PDPA lacked the institutional means to make these reforms effective. There were no mediating institutions such as civil society organizations or political parties that could interpret the program for rural residents and build support for it. The PDPA's own rural base was extremely weak. Furthermore, the weak police presence in rural areas meant that there was little the regime could do to enforce the reforms. The administrative structure it inherited was fundamentally conservative. It was designed to prevent conflicts rather than allow the state to challenge local practices and powers (Barfield, 1984). Furthermore, the bureaucracy was disrupted by the coup and subsequent purges.

This institutional weakness forced the government to rely heavily on the most effective branch of the state: the army. Because the state was relatively autonomous from society, "the party in power had virtually no resources other than violence for implementing its program, and society had few other means of resistance" (Rubin, 2002: 120). The Khalq exploited its solid base of support in the army,

using massive repression to force the program through. Somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 people were killed for resisting the reforms, local tribal and religious leaders most prominent among them (Maley, 1987; Rasanayagam, 2003: 77; Roy, 1990: 95–7, 112). The repression caused opposition as much as the reforms themselves. Roy (1990: 95–7) argues that the reforms might have been accepted in many places if the Khalqis had been more sensitive to local conditions and refrained from extensive coercion. As it was, the repression shattered whatever fragile legitimacy the central government possessed, while simultaneously decimating the traditional local leadership.

The support of the army turned out to be insufficient. Although more powerful than any individual local group, the army could not simultaneously coerce all the opponents of the Khalq program. The government was forced to resort to tribal and ethnic politics, sowing the seeds for the ultimate destruction of the Afghan state. It began to create local militias, securing the support of local groups by arming them against their traditional rivals. The process began in 1978 and involved between 160,000 and 200,000 fighters by the time of the Soviet invasion in 1979 (Giustozzi, 2000: 198–9).[12]

Even prior to the Soviet invasion these groups were not fully reliable, despite the fact that they were nominally integrated into the military chain of command. As early as April 1979, for instance, a group in Wardak province who were "asked by the government to lead a punitive expedition against the Hazara ... demanded weapons – and then went on to capture a government post" (Roy, 1990: 101).

Initially, the government was relatively restrictive in its supply of arms to militias, recognizing that those arms could be turned against it. However, the government began to supply arms more generously after the Soviet invasion. As the USA, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan provided ample arms to the mujahidin guerillas, the Soviet-supported government was compelled to do the same in order to retain the allegiance of its clients. The country became saturated with small arms, and the bidding for the support of local leaders increasingly involved more sophisticated weapons, including armored vehicles, tanks, and rocket launchers (Giustozzi, 2000: 246–7).

The security situation throughout the country deteriorated during the Soviet war, and the capacity to offer protection became an important tool for both militia and mujahidin commanders:

> The ability to offer protection (against the government or the opposition, against rival clans, against bandits) became the driving factor in local politics. Armed groups sprang up everywhere, and at least in the south, south-east and south-west of the country practically every village got at least one ... A better guarantee of protection could often be obtained by joining a larger conglomeration of villages, headed either by a renowned and powerful mujahidin leader or by a government militia leader or by some independent "warlord." (Giustozzi, 2000: 246)

The most successful leaders of the period, both on the government and the mujahidin sides, built large, quasi-state organizations that transcended local and tribal rivalries (Harpviken, 1997). Many of these quasi-states have been the most stable and durable political formations in Afghanistan, surviving the Soviet war, the ensuing civil war, the Taliban, and the current international intervention. These organizations exist today in recognizable form, and their relative independence is a major problem for the current government.[13]

The Soviets handed control of the Afghan government to their protégé, Najibullah, as they planned their withdrawal in the late 1980s. He continued to receive substantial Soviet aid until the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. Even with these resources his government was in a desperate situation, and he accelerated the strategy of sacrificing state institutions for short-term survival. He expanded the policy of arming private militias and guerilla groups. Much like Siyaad Barre in Somalia, he tried to manipulate them to attack each other instead of his government.

The Najibullah government struck deals with local commanders, essentially recognizing their local autonomy and providing them with pay and arms in exchange for limiting their attacks on government targets and keeping key transportation routes open (Roy, 1990: 213–14; Rubin, 2002: 172–5; Suhrke, 1990: 243). They were often given privileges such as the right to tax road traffic, control over the courts in their regions, advanced weaponry for their troops, and the right to keep substantial and well-armed bodyguards. One commander refused to allow his bodyguards to be disarmed by security forces upon entering the parliament, to which he was a delegate. A shoot-out ensued in which 14 people were killed. More were killed the next day when he was arrested at his house in Kabul – and yet he was back in power at his base in Kandahar within a year (Giustozzi, 2000: 230–1).[14] Thus, even before the fall of the government, the substance of power in Afghanistan had been devolved to petty despots, with little accountability to the government or the state.

Despite this decline of the state apparatus and its control over society, the Najibullah government survived for a surprisingly long two years after the Soviet withdrawal. Najibullah's strategy of playing opposition and government groups off against each other paid off. As they began to sense the end of the Najibullah government, various groups jockeyed for military supremacy, neutralizing each other and permitting the government a series of brief respites (Edwards, 2002: 288; Rubin, 2002: 147, 269). As in Somalia, each hoped to become the leader of the next government, to claim sovereignty and the foreign aid it was expected to bring. In Afghanistan, the prize was especially rich because the Russians continued to fly in shipments of banknotes printed in Germany under Soviet-era contracts (Griffin, 2001: 27).[15] In classic balance-of-power form, they shifted alliances to prevent each other's attempt to gain hegemony. By negating each other's opportunities to take the capital and claim sovereignty, they prolonged the civil war and multiplied the damage it caused. As in Somalia, the remnants of the civil service were forced to seek the protection of warlords.

As in Somalia only a year earlier, when the Afghan government fell the collapse was total. The government's desperate maneuvers had destroyed the state, and there was nothing left to sustain the country through a transition. In both cases, when the governments collapsed there was no institutional structure left to provide the basis for reconstituting authority.

The Political Logic of Self-Destructive Despotism

States are complex sets of institutions that can fail in multiple ways. For purposes of analysis, here I focus on two features associated with total collapse in the cases above: the destruction of the legal-rational bureaucratic infrastructure of the state and the erosion of its monopoly of the use of violence. In practice, these are

intertwined, but it is simpler to illustrate the logic of self-destructive despotism by treating them separately.

Bureaucratic Failure

Governments typically have ambivalent relations with the state bureaucracy. Even in well-established political systems with highly developed bureaucracies, rivalry and tensions exist. Where these do not threaten the daily existence of citizens, such conflicts may seem annoying, irrational, or even amusing. They may provide fodder for satire, such as in the British sitcom *Yes, Minister*. However, in developing countries such conflicts are apt to be far more consequential. Bureaucracies in such countries are likely to be weak and inefficient to begin with, as was the case in both Somalia and Afghanistan. Rulers lacking a popular mandate may see bureaucracies as serious threats to their power. The civil service may undercut political initiatives and new policies, hamper the delivery of services to constituents, make alliances with rivals and challengers, or retain loyalties to previous governments. Rulers may thus have an interest in hampering, subordinating, or destroying the civil service.

Government attitudes toward the civil service are calibrated to the degree of threat it poses. If the bureaucracy is seen as neutral or supportive, governments may simply seek to exploit it. They may, for instance, make excessive, politicized appointments to the civil service, bloating the bureaucracy in order to garner political support from appointees, particularly among the educated classes. This was a common technique of postcolonial governments concerned about the political loyalty of an intelligentsia that had experienced political activism in the anticolonial struggle. Many newly independent countries passed laws guaranteeing civil service appointments to college graduates. The result is a drag on efficiency as departments become overstaffed, declining morale as promotion is blocked by political appointees, and spiraling wage bills.

If the civil service is perceived as a potential threat or moderately uncooperative, the government may starve it by paying low wages. Wages may fall below the so-called "capitulation rate," at which civil servants are forced either to seek other employment or resort to extensive and routine corruption to survive. Citizens turn against the civil service, which is perceived as corrupt and self-serving. Without popular support, the effectiveness of the civil service is hampered, and it cannot act as an effective brake or counterweight to the despotic regime. While such a strategy leads to official corruption and undermines the quality of the bureaucracy, it does not necessarily lead to collapse. Indeed, governments may learn to benefit from such a situation and see it as functional (Bayart et al., 1998; Chabal and Deloz, 1999). Such policies may be highly stable, if suboptimal.

Many postcolonial governments regard the bureaucracies inherited from the colonial regime as politically suspect. Often these regimes aggressively purge the civil service, eliminating competent, experienced bureaucrats to deprive them of an institutional base from which to oppose or hamper government policy. These governments frequently secure control over the civil service by appointing loyalists to key positions, in a strategy similar to the *nomenklatura* system of socialist governments. As with the *nomenklatura* system, these appointees are frequently not qualified technically for the jobs to which they are appointed, and further reduce the efficiency of the organization by hampering free communication between its members.

Such dynamics occurred in both Somalia and Afghanistan prior to collapse. In many places, they are sustainable over the long run, and may well increase the regime's prospects for survival. Burma is an example of such a case. Postcolonial Burmese governments, suspicious of the civil service as collaborators with the colonial regime, repeatedly undermined the civil service. Major political shifts have been accompanied by purges, including the 1962 coup, the upheavals of 1988, and most recently the removal of the head of the Military Intelligence Service in 2004. Successive military governments have also starved the civil service of resources, for instance, by allowing inflation to erode wages until they are well below survival level. The result is that civil servants are forced to engage in petty corruption to survive or to moonlight while on the civil service clock.[16] The civil service has thus become increasingly corrupt, and its competence and professionalism have declined. The Burmese junta has so damaged the bureaucracy that it now has difficulty conducting even the most basic functions, such as collecting taxes and allocating resources.[17] The provision of public services has declined drastically and popular legitimacy has eroded almost completely. At the same time, the deterioration of the bureaucracy has undermined the possibility of a democratic transition in Burma, since there are no competent ministries through which a democratic regime could govern, and military officers are now required to make civilian government function (Englehart, 2005). This is precisely what the junta wants, but it creates a fragile situation: the examples of Somalia and Afghanistan suggest that external shocks or miscalculations by the junta could easily send the country into a downward spiral toward collapse.

Burma illustrates how a government can attack the civil service for a long time without precipitating collapse. Most developing countries resemble Burma more than Somalia or Afghanistan: they are chronically weak or failing without descending into collapse. Some additional factor appears to be necessary to trigger collapse.

In Somalia and Afghanistan, collapse was precipitated by serious miscalculations by leaders. In Somalia, the rise of clan-based anti-Barre forces after the failed invasion of the Ogaden and the withdrawal of citizen support as people turned to clans rather than the state for services and protection triggered such attacks on the state. In Afghanistan, the unexpected failure of the reform program and the erosion of state legitimacy after the Soviet invasion provided the trigger.

In both cases, unintended consequences thus played an important role. Siyaad apparently did not see that the Soviet Union would support Ethiopia against him. In Afghanistan, the Khalq faction of the PDPA apparently miscalculated the impact of their rural reform. Instead of the support they expected, it met with massive resistance. The Soviet invasion and the installation of the Parcham faction of the PDPA further undermined the legitimacy of the government and led to a fresh round of purges.

Attempts to construct formal models of state collapse (Bates, 2005; Bates et al., 2002; Laitin, 1999) typically assume rational actors who understand fully the consequences of their actions. However, both these weak, chronically failing states self-destructed only after serious miscalculations by leaders. Collapse came because of the choices they made in order to survive the consequences of these mistakes.

Yet however damaged the civil service, collapse seems also to require the erosion of the state's control over violence. A government can survive a thoroughly

hollowed-out bureaucracy, as long as it can avoid serious mistakes and maintain control over the use of violence.

The Control of Violence

A core characteristic of the modern Weberian state is its monopoly of the use of force. Yet in many countries, governments actively erode this monopoly by tolerating or even encouraging the unauthorized use of force. This includes permitting illegal uses of force by rogue agents of the state, collusion with criminals, and arming non-state actors such as paramilitaries and militias. The most common cause is police corruption, with politicians using the police for political ends, or permitting their supporters to use police intimidation for their own purposes. Similarly, governments may be implicated in the activities of organized crime or permit key supporters to engage in criminal activity with impunity. They may also permit the formation of militias under the command of supporters. At the extreme, some governments even arm the very opposition movements that eventually bring them down, hoping to facilitate internecine conflicts within the opposition in order to buy a little more time. As with attacks on the civil service, the erosion of the control of violence may be stable under some circumstances, but under certain conditions it can trigger a downward spiral into collapse.

Political use of the police is a fairly common phenomenon. Police can be used to control balloting points, harass the opposition, and so on. This undermines the professionalism of the police force and damages public confidence in the police. Similarly, political supporters may be allowed to use the police for their own ends, such as harassing business rivals and arresting their enemies. In exchange, they supply financial contributions, turn out reliable votes for their patrons, and so on. These activities are unlikely to precipitate state collapse, and persist for long periods in many chronically weak and failing countries.

Politicians may also become directly involved in organized crime, preventing the police from investigating crimes by supporters. In some cases, criminals may become politicians themselves, a phenomenon for which India, for instance, is infamous.

Governments may also permit the formation of private armies or militias. Often, this is to provide them with extralegal or deniable means to carry out repugnant policies (Campbell and Brenner, 2002). Rulers may also see militias as counterweights to police and military forces they do not fully control and may not trust or as rewards to loyal supporters. In Afghanistan in particular, militias were armed to secure the loyalty of local leaders and intimidate the opposition. Such private armies are dangerous because they are intrinsically difficult to control.

Haiti after the restoration of Aristide in 1994 is a classic case. The military that overthrew Aristide in 1991 was dissolved after his restoration, but the newly formed police forces included many members of the former armed forces. Aristide therefore did not trust the organization. He purged the top levels of the police, and infiltrated loyalists to act as spies on the organization. This demoralized the more professional elements of the force and reduced its effectiveness. Furthermore, Aristide also began covertly to supply weapons to unofficial militias in areas where he had strong support. These were the *chimeres*, who acted as political muscle, breaking up opposition rallies and attacking politicians, human rights activists, and journalists deemed hostile to Aristide (International Crisis Group, 2004). The most powerful of these, the so-called "Cannibal Army," subsequently turned

against Aristide after he had its charismatic leader murdered, presumably because he was becoming a potential threat to Aristide's control over the *chimeres*. This turn of events led to Aristide's second ouster.

In the most extreme cases, governments may actually provide arms to their opponents, giving them the means to destroy both government and state. This occurs when the opposition is divided, and governments hope opposing groups will turn the arms against each other. It is therefore intended to exacerbate conflicts among the opposition and secure short-term support in the absence of legitimacy. The rulers who arm the opposition would clearly prefer stronger central control over the use of violence. Yet if serious challenges emerge, their time horizons shrink, and they become more willing to undertake actions that may undermine central authority in the long run. Rulers arm the opposition as a desperate move to divide them, not so much to conquer them as to deflect their attacks in the short term.

From the perspective of militia leaders, time horizons shrink and incentives shift as the legitimacy of the central government is challenged. Even if they have been loyal supporters of the regime, they may increasingly have incentives to switch to the opposition. As the chances of the regime falling increase, militia leaders increasingly have an incentive to desert it, so as to survive and perhaps thrive after its fall. This process weakens the regime further, hastening its downfall.

Unintended consequences and miscalculations play an important role in the collapse of state control of violence as well. In Somalia, the failed Ogaden offensive embarrassed Siyaad Barre, undermining his legitimacy and at the same time saturating the Isaaq-dominated northern part of the country with weapons. Regional and clan grievances thus became activated when the regime was simultaneously weakened by the defeat and a major center of opposition became better armed. Siyaad did not presumably intend to fail in the Ogaden. A victory would have enhanced his legitimacy, leading to a very different outcome. Once he blundered into military disaster, however, he had to cope with his newly weakened position. This dramatically shrank his time horizons and made behavior that was self-destructive in the long run attractive (even necessary) in the short run.

In Afghanistan, the Khalq did not foresee the rejection of their reform program nor the Soviet invasion which removed them from power in favor of rivals in the Parcham faction of the party. The invasion and the subsequent infusion of US and Saudi support for mujahidin rebels led some militias formerly loyal to the government to turn on it. The Soviet withdrawal completed the process. The thoroughly delegitimized government clearly did not want the Soviets to leave, but there was little it could do about it. Deprived of foreign military support, Najibullah's government was clearly going to fall, and even formerly loyal militias began to abandon it en masse in preparation for the civil war to come. Both Siyaad and Najibullah survived longer than one might expect only because they managed to get the opposition to fight each other in the short term.

Self-destructive despotism thus has a logic, if a perverse one. Governments often have incentives to weaken states, to give themselves greater freedom of action, to generate resources for supporters, or to weaken potential centers of resistance. Such policies, however, have costs: bureaucracies become less effective at delivering services, collecting information, and extracting taxes. Police forces become less effective, and military units and militias become less reliable. Countries may survive in a suboptimal equilibrium for a long time, but serious miscalculations

by leaders can nudge them into short-term expedients that result in the total collapse of the state in the long run.

Conclusion

One shortcoming of case studies is that they are typically chosen on the dependent variable. This is true here, where we have examined in detail only cases of total collapse. While reference has been made to other cases that show a greater range of variation, they have not been systematically analyzed. Thus the self-destructive logic of authoritarian regimes forced into short time horizons by serious miscalculations may be common to collapses, but we have no way of knowing how often it might happen in other places without resulting in state collapse. To test the propositions above would require the examination of a great many more cases chosen in a different way.

At this point it is difficult to assess how common the dynamics of self-destructive despotism are. Although observable in theory, the policies of bureaucratic purges and the formation of militias have not yet been subjected to systematic quantitative evaluation, because the data do not yet exist.

However suggestive the inferences drawn from the Afghan and Somali cases may be, we cannot confirm them without much broader research into the phenomena of civil service purges and militia formation. Such data collection may eventually provide the basis for testing the relationships proposed here, and may thereby improve forecasts of state failure. Although it may someday be possible to predict state failure and collapse with a high degree of accuracy using statistical techniques, currently the appropriate data do not appear to exist. To achieve that goal, we would need to collect data more directly relevant to state failure. By definition statistical models will be probabilistic and limited in their usefulness, but in a world with many potential crises and limited resources to address them, the attempt to predict which states are most likely to collapse is imperative.

Notes

1. I follow Robert Rotberg's (2003) distinction between weak, failing, and collapsed states here. Weak states have a low capacity to make and carry out policy, but the state apparatus is not significantly challenged by other actors. Failing states are challenged by others – local elites who usurp much of their power, criminal gangs that operate in defiance of the state, or active insurgencies. Collapsed states are those where government has failed entirely. There may no longer be any central government (as in Somalia, for instance) or the central government may be entirely powerless (as in Afghanistan during 1992–6). See Rotberg (2003: 128).
2. On the difficulties of analyzing rare events, see King and Zeng (2001a). King and Zeng discuss the SFTF methodology more specifically in a separate article (2001b). They are able to improve on the SFTF forecasts, although, as we shall see, their improved forecasts are still not precise. The core problem is that the data we have does not precisely measure propensity to collapse.
3. The recently released phase-IV results (Political Instability Task Force, 2003) show remarkable improvements in predictive power from adding additional variables: the number of neighboring states experiencing serious instability, state-led repression of minority groups, and region. The PITF now claims to make predictions of failure with 80 percent accuracy. According to the published phase-IV results, a policymaker following their predictions after the cold war to pick the 10 most likely failures would

have correctly picked eight cases that did fail, two that did not, and would have missed two. Unfortunately, this 2003 report (actually released to the public only in 2006) does not include sufficient information to conduct a re-analysis of the type done on phase III above. Unlike phase III, phase-IV data have not been fully released. Of particular concern is the possible endogeneity between the ethnic-repression variable and the dependent variable, which includes ethnic wars and genocides. In addition, it is unclear whether the region variable has a substantive causal explanation or is simply proxying a diverse group of causal factors that make failure more common in some regions than in others. Until the full phase-IV data are released, these issues cannot be fully addressed.

4. Note that there is a bias built into the PITF approach to "adverse transitions." Transitions that make a country less democratic are counted as state failures, while those that make a country more democratic are not. Transitions to democratic regimes are only counted if they involve the territorial break-up of the authoritarian country, as, for instance, in the USSR in 1991. This may in part account for the PITF finding that democracy is a risk factor: only democratic regimes can suffer a certain kind of "adverse regime change."
5. See King and Zeng (2001b: 625). King and Zeng, however, retain the SFTF's original construct in order to refine the procedures employed by the task force. The phase-III report does segregate ethnic wars and genocides or politicides for special analysis, and the report continues these separate analyses and adds ones for sub-Saharan Africa, Muslim countries, and autocracies.
6. This subset was selected by taking only those cases of adverse regime change in the PITF phase-IV list of problem cases in which the magnitude of failure was two (failure of state authority in a limited area), three (failure of state authority in a substantial part of the country or the capital), or four (complete collapse or near total failure). This eliminates cases in which the adverse regime change indicated was a coup or other democratic setback, constituting a change of government with minimal impact on state institutions. It also eliminates civil and ethnic wars as well as genocides and politicides, unless accompanied by a breakdown of the state apparatus.
7. Again, the incomplete data for the phase-IV results makes it difficult to evaluate them. One particular problem here is that in phase IV the PITF removed some cases from the data to provide a sample against which to test the model. This was a precaution against overfitting the model to the data, which can be a serious danger in data mining. The published phase-IV results include only a single run of the model, so the omitted cases are not reported. Unfortunately, this means that of the 26 post-cold-war cases of total or partial collapse in the phase-IV events list, only 10 are reported in the published results.
8. The classic account of Somali culture and dispute resolution is Lewis (1961).
9. The circumlocution used by politically correct nationalists, "What was your ex-clan?," was similarly forbidden. See Laitin (1976: 456).
10. The primary opposition to Siyaad Barre did in fact come from clans that had dominated parliamentary politics: the Hawiye, the Isaaq, and the Majeerteen (Samatar, 1990: 91).
11. The USA picked up Somalia as a client state, but US aid never fully compensated for the loss of Soviet aid and was subsequently cut due to Somali human rights violations.
12. Factions within the PDPA may well have been vying for support against each other through alliances with local groups, as militias are frequently referred to as being associated with particular party members.
13. The most important of these are the organizations of Ahmed Shah Massoud north of Kabul, Abdul Rashid Dostum in Mazar-i-Sharif, and Ismail Khan in Heart. The people best equipped to build these new, larger political formations were not village mullahs or local leaders, but more educated people with a broader perspective (Roy, 1994: 74–81). "For the first time," writes Roy (1994: 93), "a large part of rural Afghanistan

is ruled by people who think of themselves as administrators and statesmen, not as warlords or khans."

14. For human rights abuses committed by government militias and mujahidin forces in this period, see Asia Watch (1991).
15. The nominal government of Rabbani after 1992 was entirely financed by these shipments.
16. Civil servants formerly received a ration of food and other supplies at a reduced price, a practice that was recently discontinued in lieu of a salary supplement. The fixed-price goods were, of course, resistant to inflation, while the salary supplements will not be unless they are continually increased. On civil service wages and corruption, see Aung San Suu Kyi (1996: 171–7); *Burma Issues* (1999: 3); Steinberg (2001: 53, 132–8, 157).
17. Even the World Bank, which normally favors low marginal tax rates, has expressed alarm at the low level of collections in Myanmar. World Bank (1995) shows a steady decline in the Burmese regime's capacity to tax.

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