

Nepal: A Failed or Failing State?

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Abstract

Since the mid-90s, the Maoist insurgents of Nepal have been engaged in a struggle for power with the country's ruling regime, a constitutional monarch within a democracy. There is great concern within the international community that Nepal is on the brink of a major disaster due to the prolonged violence and turmoil of civil war. The question of whether or not Nepal can be classified as a failed or failing state is therefore a research thesis question that carries many consequences. These consequences will impact not only the people of Nepal, but also the immediate surrounding areas and the international community.

The focus of this thesis was to determine if Nepal is a failed or fragile state. The main source used was the State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III; the report's classification framework for state failure was overlaid on the current situation in Nepal in answering the research question. Nepal was found to be a fragile rather than failed state. However, a slide towards total failure was determined to be possible if the international community was unable to support peace talks and assist Nepal in gaining full democracy and fulfilling its sovereign responsibilities to protect its people. The question of the international community's obligation to intervene in Nepal—and to what extent—was examined within the confines of the research question. Finally, insights

1. Statement of the Problem

The Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) is associated with University of Maryland. Its projects "have been dedicated to pursuing new and better understanding about the dynamics of conflict and conflict resolution, with a special

emphasis on the role of economic development and information technology in conflict-prone societies” (CIDCM , 2005). The State Failure Task Force (SFTF) is among these projects, and in 2000 the CIDCM published a project report titled by this name. Its purpose was to put together a tool aimed at identifying measurable characteristics of state failure (to put together a tool which could identify measurable characteristics of state failure) (SFTF phase III report, 2000).

This thesis will apply the findings of the SFTF classification framework to the situation in Nepal in order to determine whether Nepal is a fragile state or a failed state and address the issues that emerge within this classification.

2. Purpose of Research

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the field of Human Security and Peacebuilding by using Nepal as a case study in order to inform an understanding of the distinction between fragile and failed states. The secondary aim of this thesis is to gain insight into the challenge of bringing peace to an unstable conflict zone and the loaded question of intervention that this challenge invokes. Relevant questions to be addressed include: Who is responsible to intervene? What are the appropriate means of action by the international community? Is an intervention needed in Nepal and to what extent? What are the consequences of action or inaction for both the local government of Nepal and the international community? Do contemporary political contexts and ideologies play a role in the classification?

The results of this thesis will allow for the classification of Nepal as either a failed or fragile state. Its findings can then be integrated into existing tools for the design of humanitarian or military intervention strategies that aim to support conflict prevention efforts. As such, the findings can be applied to the situation of states other than Nepal in order to determine whether

these states are failed or fragile and to recommend possible paths of action that might help to prevent state failure.

3. Relevance and Significance of Research

This thesis topic is particularly relevant due to the genocides of Rwanda and Sudan and 9/11. The lessons learned from those events demonstrate how the concepts of interconnectedness and mutual vulnerability relate to peace and conflict studies. According to Jorge Neff, who has advanced these concepts, the latter demonstrates that “seemingly secure societies of the North are increasingly vulnerable to events in the less secure and hence underdeveloped regions of the globe” (Nef, 1999, pg 13). Nef framed a holistic analytical tool known as the Human Security Matrix in his book *Human Security and Mutual Vulnerability: The Global Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*. He uses it to articulate the connection between a number of variables (political, social, environmental, cultural and economic) and human security. It will be used in this case study to clarify the linkages between state failure and human security (MAHSP program course 2003).

Monty G. Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr touch upon the concept of mutual interconnectedness in a 2003 report distributed by CIDCM. They state that:

“progress and resistance have always been part and parcel of world politics... (and)...some of the most troublesome features of societal conflicts in the modern, globalizing world are their systematic effects. We can no longer afford to think of societal conflicts as localized and isolated problems requiring negotiated settlements by the leaders of the warring parties; we must see them as ‘nested’ problems that substantially effect and, in turn, are significantly affected by their surrounding environment” (Marshall, 2003, *Peace and Conflict Report* pg 15).

This concept relates to the thesis in that subjecting Nepal to a classification of state failure will demonstrate the potential impact of diverse variables and a lack of security in the region.

Furthermore, the thesis informs the study of Human Security and Peacebuilding by means of the inherent link between conflict and peace. In other words, state failures OR conflicts need to be studied and lessons need to be learned from them before peacebuilding efforts of any kind can take place in the wake of violence. A case study of Nepal is of particular value to the study of Human Security and Peacebuilding because it is going through civil strife at present and therefore accords the international community an opportunity to put lessons learned from past situations such as Rwanda into play.

Nepal's current plight is a political and societal war which has become protracted. In a 2003 report by Monty G Marshall called Peace and Conflict, countries were scored according to type of conflict, magnitude and intensity. Nepal was categorized as a magnitude two medium intensity political conflict. The scale on which magnitude is scored is similar to that which is used to categorize hurricanes or earthquakes. It goes from one (low damage) to ten (total destruction) as determined by factors such as: number of deaths; injuries (direct and indirect); number of rapes logged; dislocation of the population; societal, environmental and economic failures; health concerns; and damage and destruction to infrastructures. Magnitude refers to the general societal effects while intensity refers to the tenor of actual armed conflict. The intensity of the conflict in Nepal rose from low to medium in 2002, precipitated by the increased fighting that had occurred after a member of the Royal family murdered a number of his relatives.

It is essential to keep in mind that Nepal is listed as one of the poorest countries in the world at the World Bank website (World Bank, 2005). Since the introduction of democracy in

the 1990's, the gap between the rich and the poor has only widened—not lessened. Nearly half of all the Nepalese living in Nepal fall below the poverty line and more than 50% of the country's income comes by way of international aid. In his executive summary of Nepal, Charles Graybow, the former managing editor of Freedom House, states that: “[Nepal is] beset by corruption, civil conflict, weak institutions, and a dire lack of revenue, governance in Nepal is poor, with little prospect of immediate improvement” (Graybow, 2004). This opinion of Nepal is one of many reasons the international community, foreign policy makers, and governmental bodies (national and international) need to address the question of whether it is a failed state. Therefore, by means of studying Nepal, the research conducted for this thesis is meant to assist and add value to the existing tools which the field of Peace and Conflict Studies uses in attempting to prevent deadly conflict.

4. Overview of the State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III

The main source for this thesis was the State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III published in 2000. The members of this task force will be referred to as the SFTF or the authors for the remainder of this thesis. As chapters three and four will thoroughly introduce the report as well as present its definitions and findings, a brief statement about it will suffice here.

The SFTF report was prepared and presented by a team of experts and scholars who were knowledgeable about the subject of state failure. They created this document in order to offer guidance and knowledge regarding the classification of failed states in terms of measurable characteristics and to help policymakers make better-informed decisions. It was presented at a conference held on June 14, 2000 at the Science Application International Corporation (SAIC) in the United States.

The following chapter will discuss the research design and methodology used for this thesis, before the thesis moves on to a discussion of the SFTF report and its findings.

Conclusion

The SFTF's purpose was to look ahead two years and provide policy makers with a guide as to which states are under the threat of failure. However, it does not make recommendations for how policy makers should react to such information. Another tool or report is needed to serve this purpose. The debate over the moral and ethical question of intervention is ongoing and parties and policy makers may struggle to reach consensus on how to react. However, when an intervention is needed, it is needed quickly in a time of crisis. For this reason, more adequate guidelines for prevention as well as reaction are required and there is an urgent need for researchers to develop them.

1. Is Nepal a Failed or Fragile State?

Nepal is a Fragile or Partially Failed State.

2. Is Nepal Being Neglected?

To say that Nepal is being neglected infers that the international community takes no notice whatsoever. This would be too harsh a view. The author feels it is more appropriate to see Nepal's situation as not among the top proprieties on the world stage. Over the past few years these priorities have included the war in Iraq and efforts to help Pakistan and South East Asia to recover from natural disasters.

World politics directly affects foreign policy, and its being focused on other issues has meant that the crisis in Nepal may not be receiving the amount of attention it deserves. This may inadvertently contribute to its total failure.

The United Nations and other such bodies are involved in Nepal, but they may be pressured to spread their attention and assistance too thinly among countless situations and crises. In order to change this and offer help to Nepal, a shift in focus would be needed. Bodies such as the United Nations would need to be reorganized, mandates would need to be rewritten, and persons would need to be specifically trained and deployed to the field. However, this would require millions of dollars, not to mention innumerable man-hours and hours of negotiation. This seems to be an impossible diplomatic cause, given the number of nations and interests it would involve.

At the same time, it cannot be forgotten that allowing any state to fail directly reflects the concerns of the international community and policy makers. The responsibility and duty to assist fellow persons is our moral and ethical task. Yet, this task with which we are charged continues to elude the international community. As a result of this deficit, we turn our attention to research regarding

why there was a failure, and to devising lists of lessons learned and pointing fingers at the guilty parties—all the while setting ourselves up (the international community) for our next failure.

Among the lessons learned, how to achieve peace and harmony is one we keep failing to grasp. In asking why, this researcher contends that the international community obviously has several problematic traits which it may be unaware of. Firstly, democratic states may elect ineffective or self-serving policy makers who make inappropriate or damaging decisions for their citizens. When such policy makers represent a state which is powerful on the world stage, their decisions can have a huge and detrimental impact on the world at large. This may point to the need for states and citizens to look towards creating more truly representative and effective democracies. Secondly, neither citizens nor policy makers take responsibility when poor decisions are made. Thirdly, states' criminal and justice systems may not work as well as they should. For an example one only has to look at the tactics Saddam Hussein is employing during his trial to gain total control of the timing of the court. Fourthly, it may be possible that all the research which has been conducted in regard to peace and conflict fails to consider questions of human nature and to reveal and challenge the role of greed.

Considering the role of greed as it pertains to both conflict and intervention points to the huge financial role which foreign interests play in policy makers' decisions. The oil in the Arab Gulf is one such interest, and when its role in policy is considered, the fact that it can belong to no other country than the one in which it

is located emerges as salient. One may see this as a naïve point of view, but it is a concept deeply ingrained in what this researcher calls playground behavior: on the playground one can not take something that does not belong to oneself without asking nicely or allowing the owner the opportunity to share. Given the vast inequity which characterizes the distribution of resources in the world, the codes of proper playground behaviour would require those countries with more to help those who have less. However, greed is a powerful force and motivator in the hands or the halls of the government. What all this rhetoric boils down to in relation to Nepal is that it does not possess any resources which are of foreign interest. Consequently, it may simply be overlooked and ignored until the time comes when total failure happens and provides the international community with another opportunity to once again draw up a list of lessons learned. This researcher feels strongly that research amounts to nothing if action is not taken before there is a problem and to prevent a problem as severe as state failure. Although prevention is the number one concern of many humanitarian organizations, these organizations do not have the power which a corrupt government (foreign or local) has.

Significantly, failed and fragile states contain a large percentage of the world's poor and impoverished people. They are commonly marred by chaos and conflict, which function to breed a society of fear and misunderstanding. Consequently, these states become vulnerable to terrorism; organized crime; drug problems; disease; violations of human rights; breaches of international law; the

proliferation of Internally Displaced Persons IDPs and the rise of a refugee population.

In closing, the author of this thesis emphasizes that it is a source of shame for developed countries to allow states such as Nepal to slip into such a sad state of affairs. There should be a stronger push to assist fragile states to develop their capacity to carry out their sovereign functions in a responsible way. That said, in the last several years the international community must be acknowledged for taking a more critical view of and increased interest in the state of affairs in the world. Mass media may have helped the term 'state of affairs in the world' to become commonly used. The atrocities of Rwanda, Somalia, Congo and Kosovo (and the like) have coupled with the international community's humiliating failure to take action in causing many citizens and states to ask why we neglected to intervene when these states (in hindsight) were in obvious failure and how such events can be prevented in future. As Nepal is not yet failed, it continues to accord an opportunity for learning about how international efforts could in the short term serve to end conflict and in the long term serve to promote world peace.