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Responding to State Failure in Africa

Jeffrey Herbst

Failed states in Liberia and Somalia have already caused millions of people to suffer grievously, and there is every indication that the central government apparatus is collapsing in other African countries. The international response to these failed states has focused mainly on how to resurrect them, while limiting the number of people harmed. However, the human tragedies caused by the failure of central institutions and the opportunities provided by profound economic and political changes now occurring throughout the global system compel investigation of other responses to state failure in Africa. The article suggests some alternative strategies to deal with failure in Africa, and elsewhere, that would involve significant changes in international legal and diplomatic practices. The goal is to develop a set of responses to state failure that would be more appropriate to the circumstances of a particular state's demise, and thereby move away from the current fixation on maintaining existing units.

The Paradox of Decolonization

In precolonial Africa, a wide variety of political organizations—villages, city-states, nation-states, empires—rose and fell. However, the formal colonization of Africa and the demarcation of the continent into national states between 1885 and 1902 replaced that diversity of forms with the European model of the national state.¹ After independence, Africa's heterogeneous political heritage was brushed aside in the rush by nationalists to seize the reins of power of the nation-states as defined politically and geographically by their European colonizers. Ironically, even as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and Sekou Touré were proclaiming a break with Europe and the West, they uniformly seized upon that most western of political organizations—the nation-state—to rule.

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1. See I.M. Lewis, "Pre- and Post-Colonial Forms of Polity in Africa," in I.M. Lewis, ed., *Nationalism and Self Determination in the Horn of Africa* (London: Ithaca Press, 1983), p. 74.

The African embrace of the nation-state as theorized, designed, and demarcated by Europeans was propelled by several forces. First, many Africans were glad to be rid of the confused mixture of political institutions that characterized the precolonial period. Even as trenchant a critic of colonialism as Professor A. Adu Boahen noted that one of the positive aspects of European rule was the creation of new states with clearly defined (albeit inappropriate) boundaries in place of “the existing innumerable lineage and clan groups, city-states, kingdoms, and empires without any fixed boundaries.”² Even as they borrowed the names of great states from Africa’s past such as Benin, Ghana, and Mali, “the educated elites in West Africa—for a long time, it would be much the same in South Africa—saw Africa’s own history as irrelevant and useless. . . . when it came down to brass tacks, to the question of who should take over from the British when the British withdrew, they demanded a more or less complete flattening of the ethnic landscape.”³ Of course, the leaders themselves had a profound interest in maintaining the nation-states they inherited from the Europeans because there was no guarantee, if they began to experiment with different types of political organization, that they would continue to be in power.

Immediately upon decolonization, the United Nations General Assembly—the gatekeeper to statehood—immediately declared the new countries to be sovereign and ratified their borders. The General Assembly was encouraged to do so by the new states who soon constituted a large percentage of that body, by the excitement generated worldwide as so many states gained their freedom largely through non-violent means and the determination to support those new experiments, and by the considerable anxiety worldwide to avoid the kind of violence that accompanied the division of the Indian subcontinent in the late 1940s. However, the UN grant of sovereignty by administrative fiat, simply because a country had achieved independence, was a revolutionary departure from traditional practices whereby sovereignty had to be earned.⁴ Indeed, the central paradox of the international treatment of African states is that although sovereignty was granted simply as a result of decolonization, it was immediately assumed that the new states would take on features that had previously characterized sovereignty, most notably unquestioned physical control over the

2. A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 95.

3. Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (New York: Times Books, 1992), pp. 102–103.

4. Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

defined territory, but also an administrative presence throughout the country and the allegiance of the population to the idea of the state. Implicitly, the granting of sovereignty to the new nations also suggested that every country that gained freedom from colonization would be politically and economically viable, despite the fact that most colonies in Africa had been demarcated with the assumption that they would not become separate, independent states. Indeed, the principal criteria for state recognition today are a permanent population, a defined territory, and the ability to enter into relations with other states.⁵ The ability to control and administer the territory assigned are irrelevant to the modern conception of sovereignty; the ability to develop ties to the population even more so.

The notion that Africa was ever composed of sovereign states classically defined as having a monopoly on force in the territory within their boundaries is false. Most colonial states did not make any effort to extend the administrative apparatus of government much beyond the capital city. "In most cases," the colonial governments "were little more than elementary bureaucracies with limited personnel and finances and were more comparable to rural country governments in Europe than to modern independent States."⁶ After independence, African countries did try to extend the administrative reach of the state, but were always more focused on the urban populations.

Although sovereignty was for some countries little more than a legal fiction, it was relatively easy to maintain appearances in the 1960s and 1970s. Most African economies were growing, buoyed by global economic growth and relatively high prices for basic commodities, export of which formed the basis of most of the formal economies. The global strategic competition between the United States and Soviet Union also discouraged threats to the design of states in Africa or elsewhere. One of the implicit rules of the Cold War was that supporting efforts to change boundaries was not part of the game. In fact, where the great powers intervened, it was usually to protect the integrity of existing states (as in Zaire, Chad, and Ethiopia).⁷

Finally, no intellectual challenge was made to the immediate assumption of sovereignty by African states. Decolonization happened so quickly and Afri-

5. John Dugard, *Recognition and the United Nations* (Cambridge, U.K.: Grotius Publications, 1987), p. 7.

6. Robert H. Jackson, "Sub-Saharan Africa," in Robert H. Jackson and Alan James, eds., *States in a Changing World: A Contemporary Analysis* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 139.

7. I have developed this argument in Jeffrey Herbst, "The Challenges to Africa's Boundaries," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Summer 1992), pp. 17-31.

cans were so intent on seizing power that there was neither the time nor the motivation to develop new concepts of national political organization. Then, once the dozens of newly independent states were created, leaders found that the window of opportunity when they could have instituted revolutionary change in political structures was closing.⁸

The Facade of Sovereignty Overturned

The actual nature of some African countries' sovereignty is now being exposed. The long economic crisis that many African countries have experienced has caused a profound erosion of many governments' revenue bases. Even the most basic agents of the state—agricultural extension agents, tax collectors, census takers—are no longer to be found in many rural areas. As a result, some states are increasingly unable to exercise physical control over their territories. William C. Thom, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Officer for Africa, has written:

Most African state armies are in decline, beset by a combination of shrinking budgets, international pressures to downsize and demobilize, and the lack of the freely accessible military assistance that characterized the Cold War period. With few exceptions, heavy weapons lie dormant, equipment is in disrepair, and training is almost nonexistent. . . . The principal forces of order are in disorder in many countries at a time when the legitimacy of central governments (and indeed sometimes the state) is in doubt.⁹

Low or negative per capita growth in many African countries suggests that this sort of gradual dissolution will become more common in the future.¹⁰

The extremely limited revenue base of many African countries is also partially responsible for one of the most notable developments on the continent over the last thirty years: the change in the military balance between state and society. Whatever their other problems, African states at independence usually had control over the few weapons in their country. However, as states have atrophied, those who wish to challenge a government have been able to arm, helped by the weapons spillover from conflicts throughout the continent and

8. This point is made well by Julius K. Nyerere, *Uhuru na Ujamaa* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 28 and 209.

9. William C. Thom, "An Assessment of Prospects for Ending Domestic Military Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa," *CSIS Africa Notes*, No. 177 (October 1995), p. 3.

10. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, Gross National Product declined at an average rate of 0.8 percent from 1980 to 1993. World Bank, *World Development Report 1995* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1995), p. 163.

the cheap price of armaments after the Cold War. Thus, armies, as in Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Chad, have challenged African governments; private security outfits such as the South African-based "Executive Outcomes" help governments such as Angola and Sierra Leone control their territory.

At the same time, international assistance to many African states is stagnant or declining. As donors redirect their aid from Cold War proxies to countries that are achieving some economic and political reform, countries that are failing spiral further downward. Somalia began to decline more sharply when it could no longer play the United States off against the Soviet Union in order to receive more aid. The decline in aid represents a fundamental break with the practice of the last one hundred years, which saw international actors offer support to the African state system, first through the creation of colonies, then by the enshrinement of sovereignty, and finally by the provision of financial resources without regard to domestic economic or political performance.¹¹ It is thus hardly surprising that so many African states have failed since the Berlin Wall fell, nor that those that collapsed include a notable number of states that had been richly rewarded by international patrons because of their strategic position during the Cold War but were subsequently cut off when aid donors became more concerned with economic and political performance (e.g., Ethiopia, Liberia, Somalia, Zaire).

As a result of this combination of forces, the centers of some states, notably Liberia and Somalia, collapsed when the contending parties were unable to break a military stalemate. More common are the states that are simply contracting because, while the centers still exist, they cannot extend their power very far over the territory they formally control. Zaire is perhaps the worst case: Mobutu seems intent on controlling whatever remains of the country he has bled dry, and the government has extremely limited control over territory outside the capital, to the point that some provinces no longer accept the national currency as legal scrip.¹² In a number of countries, the state is slowly being merged into a web of informal business associations instituted by rulers who have little interest in carrying out the traditional functions of the state and

11. For instance, from 1962 to 1988, six countries—Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, and Zaire—accounted for most U.S. foreign aid to Africa, despite their exceptionally poor economic and political performances. Indeed, all but Kenya can now be considered failed states despite American largesse. Michael Clough, *Free at Last: U.S. Policy toward Africa and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1992), p. 77.

12. Steven Metz, *Reform, Conflict, and Security in Zaire* (Carlisle, Penn.: U.S. Army War College, 1996), pp. 25, 35.

who do not recognize or respect boundaries while enriching themselves through trade.¹³ However, it would be incorrect to suggest that all states in Africa are collapsing. Benin, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, and others are significantly increasing their states' capabilities due to the implementation of reform programs. A significant number of other countries are not enhancing state capabilities but are not in obvious decline at the moment. Africa thus presents a picture of heterogeneous state formation.

Unfortunately, the international community, in its response to state failure in Africa, has refused to acknowledge the structural factors at work, despite mounting evidence that the loss of sovereign control is becoming a pattern in at least parts of Africa. Rather, each state failure is taken as a unique event. No doubt, the confluence of factors supporting African sovereignty in the past was so strong that considerable inertia within international organizations now supports the assumption that there is no alternative to the current nation-states. Moreover, African diplomats, who are among the chief beneficiaries of current attitudes towards sovereignty, work hard to suppress any change in international diplomatic practices. For instance, even though it was obvious that Somalia had collapsed by December 1992, when the U.S.-UN intervention force was being planned, no one seriously considered trusteeship or any other legal concept other than continuing the fiction that Somalia was still a sovereign nation-state. Thus, the resolution on intervention to the Security Council was actually proposed by a former Somali prime minister, so that the UN could pretend that the Somali state was asking for the foreign troops.

Numerous critiques of the performance of African states also assume that there is no alternative to the status quo. For instance, the North-South Roundtable recognized that "institutional decay is currently of endemic proportion in Africa. In all sectors of the polity, the great institutions of the State have failed woefully. Evidence of institutional crisis abounds: in the political system, in the public service, in the management of the economy and even in the military."¹⁴ Even so, the Roundtable restricted itself to asking how the existing states could be reinvigorated despite the long-term record of failure associated with Africa's extant political institutions. No energy was devoted to exploring alternatives.

13. William Reno, "War, Markets and the Reconfiguration of West Africa's Weak States," unpublished paper, Florida International University, September 1995, p. 1.

14. North-South Roundtable, *Revitalizing Africa for the 21st Century: An Agenda for Renewal* (Rome: Society for International Development, 1995), p. 15.

The now-burgeoning literature on failed states also focuses largely on preventing crises, so that states with poor track records can continue to exist, or on discovering methods to put the failed states back together. For instance, I. William Zartman, while admitting that a case can potentially be made for changes in the nature of the nation-state, still argues:

It is better to reaffirm the validity of the existing unit and make it work, using it as a framework for adequate attention to the concerns of citizens and the responsibilities of sovereignty, rather than experimenting with smaller units, possibly more homogeneous but less broadly based and stable. . . . In general, restoration of stateness is dependent on reaffirmation of the precollapse state.¹⁵

Thus, there has been little discussion of alternatives even to post-genocide Rwanda, despite its obvious structural problems and despite the fact that its current government, whose only constituency is the minority Tutsi, is obviously not viable.

Some suggest that alternatives to the nation-state will not develop because the international community has been so conservative in recognizing the viability of alternatives. Thus, Robert Jackson argues, "there is little evidence to suggest that the rules of this sovereignty game will not continue to be generally observed in the future as they have in the past."¹⁶ However, as Hendrik Spruyt has argued, change in the nature of the constitutive units of the international system has not always taken place in a slow, incremental manner. Rather, there are long periods of stability followed by periods of sudden, chaotic institutional innovation. In such a manner did the sovereign state become the dominant institution in Europe.¹⁷

Now that so many of the props which supported the state system in Africa have been eliminated, the stage for revolutionary change has been set. Indeed, the norms of the international community are in tumult. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has written that "the time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty . . . has passed; its theory was never matched by reality."¹⁸ More generally, the flux induced by the end of the Cold War opens up the possibility for new organizational forms. Already, "Kurdistan" in northern Iraq, the political organization that is now forming in the West Bank and Gaza, and the

15. I. William Zartman, "Putting Things Back Together," in I. William Zartman, ed., *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), p. 268.

16. Jackson, "Sub-Saharan Africa," p. 154.

17. Henrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 186.

18. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace 1995* (New York: United Nations, 1995), p. 44.

“one country, two entity” creation in Bosnia are challenging the complete monopoly of the nation-state. That these creations were largely brokered by the great powers, previously among the most conservative forces in the international community, suggests that the scope for alternatives is increasing.

Finally, the dramatic failures of some states and the poor performance of many others has diminished the attachment that many in Africa automatically felt towards the new nation-states in the 1960s. Two entire generations have now lived under states that have failed to deliver the goods in terms of economic well-being, political order, or freedom. A new window of opportunity has therefore opened as many Africans begin to question the enshrinement of sovereignty for the nation-states designed by the Europeans. For instance, Dr. Christopher Bakwesegha, head of the Organization of African Unity’s Division of Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution, has noted that although the OAU charter “still has this principle of non-interference, in reality it is being ignored.”¹⁹ While this may be an overstatement, given the attachment that many leaders feel to sovereignty, there may be increasing attention to alternatives.

Old and New Conceptions of African Sovereignty

Understanding what was lost when the Europeans imposed the territorial nation-state is a first step toward investigating what might be appropriate for Africa today. This is not to engage in misty-eyed nostalgia that somehow political formations developed hundreds of years ago can be replicated today. As Davidson notes, “the precolonial past is not recoverable.”²⁰ However, understanding what the colonialists destroyed little more than a century ago should be helpful to the development of a more indigenous alternative to the nation-state as theorized, designed, and imposed by the Europeans.

Precolonial sovereignty had two features radically different from sovereignty exercised in modern Africa. First, in large parts of precolonial Africa, control tended to be exercised over people rather than land.²¹ Land was plentiful and populations thin on the ground. Indeed, many precolonial polities were “surrounded by large tracts of land that were open politically or physically or

19. “As OAU Moves into Peace-Keeping, Non-Interference Concept is no Longer Sacrosanct,” *Africa Recovery*, Vol. 9 (August 1995), p. 5.

20. Davidson, *The Black Man’s Burden*, p. 315.

21. See Jack Goody, *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 30.

both."²² As land was not seen as the constraining resource, exercising political power primarily meant control over individuals. Precolonial African practices were thus not that different from feudal Europe, where hard territorial boundaries were a rather late development.²³ However, the precolonial practices were radically different from the later European and post-independence African view that "states are territorial entities."²⁴

The second notable aspect of precolonial political practices was that sovereignty tended to be shared. It was not unusual for a community to have nominal obligations and allegiances to more than one political center. As power was not strictly defined spatially, there was much greater confusion over what it meant to control a particular community at any one time. At the same time, communications and technology were so poorly developed that few political centers could hope to wield unquestioned authority, even over the areas that they were thought to control. Ivor Wilks, in writing about the Ashanti theory of sovereignty, noted that "rights of sovereignty were regarded as distinguishable from the exercise of authority." Thus, it was not an uncommon practice in Ashanti law for the land to belong to one authority (e.g., the southern provinces to the Asantahene) but for the people to owe allegiance to another (in the case of the south, to the Fante or the British Governor).²⁵ Indeed, such were the limits of territorial authority that the central government was often not concerned about what outlying areas did as long as tribute was paid.²⁶

In this respect, precolonial Africa was similar to medieval Europe, where shared sovereignty—e.g., between the Church and various political units—was not uncommon.²⁷ However, again, this differs markedly from the modern notion of statehood, where sovereign control over each piece of territory is unambiguous: "there is never any doubt about where one stands, and that one always stands on the domain of a single sovereign state."²⁸

22. Igor Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Political Culture," in Igor Kopytoff, ed., *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 10.

23. John Gerald Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Towards a Neorealist Synthesis," *World Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (January 1983), p. 274.

24. James Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 36.

25. Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 191–192.

26. Jan Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savannah* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), pp. 82.

27. F.H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 60.

28. Alan James, *Sovereign Statehood: The Basis of International Society* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 31.

As a result, many precolonial African states were far more dynamic than has been the case in the world since 1945. Political organizations were created, and they rose and fell naturally in response to opportunities and challenges.²⁹ Many outlying territories found that they could escape their rulers' authority relatively easily. For instance, in the Central African kingdoms, "provinces could break off from the kingdom whenever circumstances were favorable. This happened in Kongo, in the Kuba kingdom, and in the Luanda empire, where every ruler who was far enough away . . . became independent."³⁰ Indeed, war was a common feature of precolonial African politics.³¹ Political control in precolonial Africa had to be acquired through the construction of loyalties, the use of coercion, and the creation of an infrastructure. Indeed, political control over outlying areas could never be taken for granted given that the environment made it so difficult to continually exert control over any significant distance. For instance, the Ashanti empire was able to extend control over relatively large distances and have some of the attributes of a modern nation-state because of an extensive series of roads that converged on the capital, Kumasi. Of places beyond the great roads, it was said that "no Asante is familiar with these places because the King's highways do not run there."³²

The imposition of territorial states by colonial authorities was thus a severe disruption of African political practices. The conception of the nation-state as introduced by the Europeans required only that territory be clearly demarcated. Authority was not dependent on popular support or legitimacy. Thus, Lord Hailey could write of the African officials through whom the British governed: "Everywhere the supervision exercised over them must bring home the lesson that the sanction for their authority is no longer the goodwill of their own people, but the recognition accorded to them by the administration."³³ For instance, in Ghana, the disjuncture between how colonial power was exercised and the old precolonial infrastructure of control became greater and greater as formal political authority migrated from the traditional Ashanti capital of Kumasi to the colonial capital of Accra. In fact, British administrators in the territory would argue as late as 1870 that there was no reason to maintain the old road network that had been central to the exercise of precolonial power.³⁴

29. Among the many studies making this point, see S.I.G. Mudenge, *A Political History of Munhumutapa, c. 1400–1902* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988), p. 76.

30. Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savannah*, p. 247.

31. Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 3rd ed. (London: James Currey, 1988), p. 99.

32. See Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 1–2.

33. Lord Hailey, *An African Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 539–540.

34. Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 12.

There was nothing exotic about the precolonial African state system. Where Europe and Africa diverge is in the speed in which they moved from one system to another. The European evolution from the old system of states where territory was not well defined and sovereignty was shared was very slow, taking centuries. While the slow transformation from one system to another made it difficult for states to deal with crises, there were advantages to a state in not being called upon to exercise all aspects of modern sovereignty at once: for instance, in many European countries, local notables were still responsible for arresting criminals and providing social services long after the modern state was created, because the state did not have the capacity to carry out these functions.³⁵ Thus, in Europe there was time for relatively viable states to develop.

In Africa, however, there was an abrupt discontinuity between the old political order and the new one that essentially began with the Berlin West African Conference in 1885. In the space of a few decades, the facade of the new state system was formed and then, shortly thereafter, the states were given independence. The hard-earned structures of political control and authority that allowed for the exercise of political power in the precolonial period were abruptly cast aside, and there were almost no efforts to resurrect them. Indeed, the demarcation of Africa into colonies differed even from imperial practices in other areas of the world in the speed at which it was done, due to the multitude of countries seeking to rule the same area, and the reliance on force to the exclusion of developing loyalties among the subject population.³⁶

The Implications of the New Sovereignty

The profound changes in the nature of sovereignty both aggravated decline in Africa and institutionalized it. First, the natural bias of African leaders to serve the urban population, who could threaten to riot and physically challenge leaders,³⁷ was encouraged because the new theory of sovereignty provided few incentives for leaders to develop networks of support in the rural areas. The Organization of African Unity and the United Nations bestowed recognition

35. Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 105–106.

36. Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 278.

37. See generally Robert H. Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 31–33.

on governments that controlled their capitals, irrespective of whether those states had much of a physical presence in the rural areas. When there were attempts at revolt in the rural areas, the international community both implicitly and explicitly gave its approval to the use of force to quash the revolts, demonstrating that a state's treatment of its rural population would have little bearing on its international position. Thus, the bias toward urban dwellers and the neglect of the majority of Africans in the rural areas can be traced, in part, to a state system that encouraged elites to cultivate their urban constituencies.

Second, part of the failure to accommodate ethnic diversity in some states comes from the international community's acquiescence in the freezing of boundaries. If secession had been a viable threat, as it had been during the precolonial period, African politicians would have had a profound incentive to reach accommodation with disaffected populations, especially those that were spatially defined, lest they threaten to leave the nation-state. However, the international community's view that the boundaries were inviolable and that, therefore, the use of force was justified against potential secessionists, removed incentives for ethnic accommodation. Indeed, the great powers often went beyond acquiescence to actively providing arms and expertise for the crushing of secessionist movements, so that even obviously dysfunctional states could maintain their territorial integrity.

Perhaps more important, the current static state system in Africa has institutionalized weakness and decline, irrespective of the sources of failure. The current complete disassociation between a country's economic and political performance and its sovereign status means that, no matter how poorly a country performs, the international community continues to give it legitimacy, pretends that it is a functioning state, and supports efforts to preserve its integrity. Thus, even a country as dysfunctional as Zaire is still viewed as a viable unit and a sovereign country despite the fact that the writ of President Mobutu does not extend much beyond Kinshasa. If states as weak as some in Africa had existed in the precolonial era, they would have fallen apart or been conquered, potentially opening the way for more viable state structures to be created. However, the price of boundary stability has been that even dysfunctional states have claims on the international system. There are thus repeated efforts by the United States, the UN, or African neighbors to put back together Somalia, Liberia, and other countries even though there is little evidence that they ever worked well.

It is thus hardly a surprise that the African development experience has been peculiarly bad. Patrick Conway and Joshua Greene concluded that for the

period 1976–86, “the macroeconomic performance and policies of African countries differed significantly from those of non-African developing countries in many respects. . . . African countries had lower investment and inflation rates. In addition, they exhibited lower rates of real economic growth even after adjustment for external and developmental factors.”³⁸ Unfortunately, the evidence of poor performance is taken either as the best that could be done under the circumstances by advocates of current policies, or as an indication that the current policies are incorrect by those who want some other set of policies adopted.³⁹ Few have asked the more important question of whether the policies, even if correctly designed, are not working because the nation-states themselves are profoundly flawed.

The following sections first examine alternatives to existing states that would still operate within the current state system, and then examine alternatives to the nation-state itself. I provide an outline of options for policymakers who must in the short term work within the realities of current diplomatic practice, but who can also change standard operating procedures over the long term. The presentation of alternatives is made in the optimistic spirit that even areas in Africa that have experienced grave political failures can develop viable political institutions. I therefore reject the defeatist attitude that either nothing will work in some parts of Africa or that the status quo is the best that can be hoped for.

Alternatives within the Current International State System

The current unvarying reliance on the states that Europe gave to Africa must give way to a world which at least recognizes the possibility of alternatives. The recognition that reform is possible should be guided by two propositions. First, proposed alternatives must, in the end, come from the Africans themselves. No alternative to the nation-state is going to be forced on Africa, especially given the history of colonialism that began with the Berlin Conference. Second, the aim of any alternative should be to increase the dynamism of state formation, so that stronger national units can emerge and dysfunctional ones do not necessarily have to continue indefinitely. Not only would such

38. Patrick Conway and Joshua Greene, “Is Africa Different?” *World Development*, Vol. 21, No. 12 (December 1993), p. 2025.

39. See the critique of the latest World Bank report on Africa by Paul Mosley, Turan Subasat, and John Weeks, “Assessing *Adjustment in Africa*,” *World Development*, Vol. 23, No. 9 (September 1995), pp. 1459–1473.

dynamism have strong resonance with the African past, it would also be critical to setting the essential foundation for political and economic development. Of course, dynamism also means instability, and potentially conflict. The downside of dynamism must be acknowledged and efforts made to ameliorate the damage that could occur if states are to become more fluid creations.

BREAKING THE INTELLECTUAL LOG-JAM

The first step toward developing new alternatives would be to provide the intellectual space necessary for Africans to present alternatives; this could be accomplished by publicly declaring that the international community is not blindly wedded to the current state system. This would be a revolutionary act that might help to break the intellectual log-jam that devotion to the status quo has caused. Given the state of African universities, the international community might have to go further and provide resources for think tanks and individuals who might want to analyze alternatives to the nation-state. Western donors are already providing significant amounts of money for "governance" to aid Africa's new democracies in their political transition. Some of this money could be redirected to the bigger question of whether some countries are presently viable. Once it is clear that there is at least some fluidity in the state system, African alternatives will not be long in coming. For instance, some leading politicians in Sudan are demanding that the people of Southern Sudan be able to "exercise their fundamental rights of reviewing the experience of the single sovereign state."⁴⁰ Of course, some of those proposing changes in the state system, and, by obvious implication, in their own countries, may risk the wrath of their own leaders. Indeed, Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues were executed by the Nigerian authorities in 1995 because they demanded greater self-determination for the Ogoni people. Advocates of change in national design should be provided with protection, much like that currently provided by the international community for democrats urging liberalization in their own countries.

To date, it is not surprising that few countries have engaged in bold experiments regarding national design, given the skeptical international environment. Perhaps the most intriguing possibility for re-engineering an existing African state, especially in regard to the rights of minority groups, is the new Ethiopian constitution which provides for the possibility of secession based on

40. Alfred Taban, "Letter on Self-Determination," *Reuters*, November 12, 1995. The quotation is from an open letter sent by five leading politicians, including former Vice President Abel Alier, to the government of Sudan.

a two-thirds majority vote. This constitution has been backed by a large number of Western countries despite the fact that it explicitly challenges many of the notions of post-World War II diplomacy, especially as it has evolved in Africa. The logic behind the Ethiopian constitution is much the same as the logic driving the liberalization of capital controls worldwide: if a country has made a credible commitment that groups (or in the case of capital controls, money) can leave the country if the minorities (or owners of capital) are unhappy, this demonstrates a government's confidence that it will adopt policies that will not lead to a ruinous exit. Potential secessionists, understanding that they have considerable leverage *vis-à-vis* the central government, may therefore no longer fear marginalization. The Ethiopian constitution does go some way toward restoring the old precolonial practice whereby outlying areas could leave the existing political unit with relatively little difficulty if they are unhappy with their political leaders. Unfortunately, there are apparently no other examples in Africa of significant constitutional innovation to create a fundamentally new type of state practice in response to disintegration; Ethiopia only adopted its current rules after it lost a long civil war that led to the independence of Eritrea, its former province.

To aid further development of alternatives to the current state system, the international community and African countries can also begin to study African problems on a regional basis without regard to country boundaries. Despite seemingly endless rhetoric about the regional nature of many African problems, most reports and analytic works still use the existing nation-states as their unit of analysis. Studies of Southern Africa, for instance, are organized around the member countries of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The intellectual framework continues to be dogmatically based on the current maps because in many cases multilateral agencies such as the United Nations and the World Bank—constituted solely by sovereign states—are conducting or funding the analysis. These agencies find it hard to work on any set of assumptions other than that the current boundaries will continue indefinitely, because the UN system itself is the source of the sovereignty which African leaders jealously guard.

The relatively few studies not based on existing boundaries are important to note because they suggest the possibilities that are opened when the old framework is discarded. Arguably, the most innovative recent work on African development is the West Africa Long Term Perspective Study published by the Club du Sahel. The study seeks to analyze West Africa as a whole to understand region-wide dynamics, and places rather less emphasis on political boundaries.

Indeed, it is one of the few official publications, perhaps the only one, to question the future of the state system. In a text box entitled "Rethinking the Shape of the West African State" the report notes, "Sahelian states are too large, sparsely populated, and hard to manage; some coastal states are too small and do not have a critical mass of population."⁴¹ This analysis implies that the adoption of particular economic and political policies may be fruitless because the overall design of the nation is a permanent barrier to development irrespective of policy choice.

Academics have also conducted most of their analysis according to the territorial grid. One exception is Hans-Werner Sinn, who argues that the best way to aid Sahelian countries may be to provide aid to coastal West African countries with the expectation that migration toward the littoral nations will continue. Sinn's argument is that direct aid to the Sahel region produces less of a rise in aggregate output than does aid to the richer coastal countries, and that the development prospects of the Sahel are so limited that future aid is problematic.⁴² Whether Sinn is right or not, he has produced the kind of regionally based analysis that is critical to Africa's future.

Donors can accelerate the process of designing new alternatives by using some of their aid for regional integration to promote alternatives and projects which treat sections of Africa as regions, as opposed to groupings of countries. Under current practices, foreign aid further reifies practices of approaching regional problems by using existing countries as the unit of analysis. For instance, aid to Southern Africa currently helps support the Southern African state system because its member countries have frequently used the SADC as an aid platform to garner more funds from the international community than would have been possible if each country had to ask for assistance by itself. The fact that the United States has closed its aid missions in Lesotho and Swaziland (for budgetary reasons) and will instead allocate assistance to those countries from Pretoria could be incorporated into a message to these countries, especially Lesotho, that the nature of their states, especially in the post-apartheid era, will have to be rethought. So far the Lesotho government has refused to entertain the idea of incorporation inside South Africa despite the fact that it is surrounded by its neighbor and that, with only ten percent of its land arable, has little hope of being viable. Indeed, given Lesotho's extraordinary

41. Club du Sahel, *Preparing for the Future: A Vision of West Africa in the Year 2020* (Paris: Club du Sahel, 1995), p. 47.

42. Hans-Werner Sinn, "The Sahel Problem," *Kyklos*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1988), pp. 209–210.

aid dependence (three times the African average in the 1990s),⁴³ that small country may be a particularly good test of the possibilities for redesigning African states. At present, however, the government in Maseru dreams of taking parts of "the lost lands" back from South Africa.⁴⁴ Projects with a true regional scope and which allocate funds to recipients irrespective of the country they are in would be a further useful step not only in promoting development but in establishing a new intellectual framework.

RECOGNIZING NEW NATION-STATES

After thirty years of assuming that the boundaries of even the most dysfunctional African state are inviolable, another important initiative for the international community would be to consider the possibility of allowing for the creation of new sovereign states. Opening the possibility for new states to be created would challenge the basic assumption held by African leaders and the international community that boundaries drawn haphazardly during the scramble for Africa a century ago with little regard to the social, political, economic, or ethnic realities on the ground should continue to be universally respected. At the same time, allowing for more dynamism in the creation of African states would help recapture the element of the precolonial perspective on sovereignty that insisted that political control had to be won, not instituted by administrative fiat.

A criterion for recognition appropriate to the particular circumstances of Africa's failing states could be: does the break-away area provide more political order on its own over a significant period of time (say, five years) than is provided by the central government? By order, I mean functioning military, police, and judicial systems, which are the fundamental prerequisites for political and economic progress. These public goods are precisely what Africa's failing states do not provide. Such a standard would rule out many attempts at secession that were not of the utmost seriousness, and also return, to a degree, to older understandings of sovereignty that are resonant with the African past. The long-term aim would be to provide international recognition to the governmental units that are actually providing order to their citizens as opposed to relying on the fictions of the past. It would also place emphasis on the need for recognized states to provide order, a clarity that is missing in

43. World Bank, *African Development Indicators 1996* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1996), p. 315.

44. Violet Maraisane, "Lesotho: Southern African Nation Ponders its Future," *Inter Press Service*, December 14, 1995.

suggestions that recognition of new states requires numerous tests (e.g., presence of democracy, granting the right to dissent, signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) that, while highly desirable, are not appropriate given the particular crisis that some African states face in just trying to control their territory.⁴⁵

The primary objection to recognizing new states in Africa has been the basis for selection. Given that there are very few “natural” boundaries in Africa which would allow for the rational demarcation of land on the basis of ethnic, geographic, or economic criteria, the worry is that recognizing new African states will lead to a splintering process that would promote the creation of ever-smaller units, with seemingly endless political chaos. Thus, Gidon Gottlieb argues against the creation of new states because he fears “anarchy and disorder on a planetary scale.”⁴⁶ The very real cost of new nation-state construction, especially the almost inevitable mass movement of people with all the suffering that such movements usually entail, is another important consideration for those who argue that Africa’s boundaries must be preserved at any cost.

The argument is that once new states are recognized, descent down the slippery slope of microstate creation is inevitable. This argument credits the international community and Africans with no ability to discern the specifics of situations on a case-by-case basis. To say that new states should be recognized does not mean that criteria for state recognition cannot exist. It simply suggests that the criteria have to be created and that the dogmatic devotion to the current boundaries be discarded. If one criterion is based on who is providing order over the long-term, this would be a very difficult test; it would not lead toward the creation of many small states because it is simply not the case that potential secessionists exercise such unambiguous control in many parts of Africa. It was not the case, for instance, that Africa experienced a sudden splintering of states after Eritrea achieved its independence, or after the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia dissolved.

At some point, the reality of disintegrating, dysfunctional African states stands in such contrast to the legal fiction of sovereign states that experimentation with regards to new states is in order. For instance, in Somaliland (the breakaway northern province of Somalia that has declared its independence),

45. These tests, and others, are proposed for recognition of a new state by Morton H. Halperin and David J. Scheffer with Patricia L. Small, *Self-Determination in the New World Order* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1992), pp. 84–94.

46. Gidon Gottlieb, *Nation against State* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1993), p. 26.

order is being provided. A central government has been created with military units from across the country, a police force is operating and, in some parts of the country, local civil administrative structures operate.⁴⁷ In contrast, in the rest of Somalia there is chaos, despite the fact that the South has received a tremendous amount of foreign assistance and Somaliland very little. This is not to underestimate the problems facing Somaliland, which are numerous and daunting. However, the United States, the major European powers, and its African neighbors should consider recognizing Somaliland, given the potentially positive developments there that contrast with the chaos of Mogadishu. Clearly, the current international practice of waiting for a signal from Mogadishu to recognize Somaliland, when there is no government in Mogadishu to send such a signal, is bankrupt.

The resistance to creation of new states should also be tempered by recognition of the positive developments in Eritrea since its independence from Ethiopia. The international community continued to support the territorial integrity of Ethiopia until the Eritreans and their allies won an outright military victory. The donors—after decades of trying to convince the Eritreans that they would be better off as part of Ethiopia and that they would not be viable as an independent unit—now single out Eritrea as a success because of its sensible policies and commitment to development. The great powers' implicit acknowledgment that they were wrong about the viability of Eritrea is an important reminder that the commitment to the old borders has blinded many to the potential advantages of new states that may be better able to harness the commitment and energies of their peoples.

The consequences of adopting new rules regarding secession will also depend on the competence the international community demonstrates in confronting failed states and in sending out the right signals. The European Union's response to the dissolution of Yugoslavia was not planned well; the situation may well have been aggravated by the EU's continually changing positions.⁴⁸ A more thoughtful response to failed states, and in particular the development of criteria for changing diplomatic practices based on who is actually providing order, would help ameliorate the damage from what would be profound changes in diplomatic practice by reducing uncertainty amongst the participants.

47. Matt Bryden, "Somaliland at the Cross-Roads," found at the NomadNet home page: <http://www.users.interport.net/~mmaren/brysomland.html>, April 1996, p. 3.

48. Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995), p. 187.

This is not to say that granting the right to secession to at least some groups which were able to establish order within their own areas would be without its dangers. Clearly, any signal from the international community that its commitment to the territorial integrity of African states is being reduced could result in considerable instability and uncertainty, and would be met by vehement opposition on the part of many African states which have grown dependent on the post-World War II understanding of sovereignty.

However, the reality on the ground in some African countries is that sovereign control is not being exercised by the central state in outlying areas, and sub-national groups are already exerting authority in certain regions. By recognizing and legitimating those groups, the international community has the opportunity to ask that they respect international norms regarding human rights and also has a chance to bring them into the international economy. For instance, even during intervention in Somalia, initiated explicitly because the central government apparatus had collapsed in Mogadishu, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund offered no assistance to Somaliland, although the breakaway government in Hargeisa was at least providing some services to its citizens.⁴⁹ A less dogmatic approach to sovereignty would have allowed the international community to begin to help a substantial number of people. If the new sub-national arrangements are ignored, they will continue to be more like institutionalized protection rackets than states that guard the rights of their citizens. Local rulers who are actually exercising elements of sovereign control will focus on informal trade, often involving drugs, guns, and poached animals, to survive, rather than beginning initiatives to promote economic development that would aid all of the people in their region. The international community thus faces the choice between ignoring successful secessionist movements and thereby forcing them to remain semi-criminal affairs, or trying to help create new state institutions. The fact that some African states will dissolve will be the reality no matter which policy stance is adopted.

Alternatives to the Sovereign State

A far more revolutionary approach would be for at least parts of Africa to be reordered around some organization other than the sovereign state. While such reforms would be a dramatic change for international society, their adoption would be an important acknowledgment of what is actually happening in parts

49. John Drysdale, *Whatever Happened to Somalia?* (London: HAAN Associates, 1994), p. 147.

of Africa where many states do not exercise sovereign authority over their territories. Indeed, in a world where capital knows no boundaries and where force projection over distance is increasingly easy, it is peculiar that political power continues to be firmly demarcated according to territory. Developing alternatives to the current understanding of sovereignty would be consistent with older African practices where sovereignty was sometimes shared and where there were many different arrangements regarding the exercise of political authority depending on local circumstances.

It will primarily be up to the Africans to come up with alternatives to the nation-state. However, the international community can play an important role in signaling that the atmosphere has changed and that there is at least the possibility that alternatives to the sovereign state could be accepted. Indeed, alternatives to the nation-state are being developed now. For instance, the anarchy of Somalia has prompted some scholars to, finally, discuss alternatives to the old, failed political order.⁵⁰

MAKING INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS MORE FLEXIBLE

An important area to explore would be experiments that account for the diminishing control that some African governments exercise over distance. In areas far from the capital, other actors, including traditional leaders and local warlords who have moved into the vacuum created by the collapse of the local branches of the state, may exercise substantial control, provide security, and collect taxes. In some of the failed or failing states in Africa, rural communities already face a complex situation where sovereign control is only exercised partially, if at all, by the central government. These situations differ from the criteria discussed above for recognizing new states because no obvious authority exercises clear control over a defined piece of territory. Unfortunately, this confused situation is probably much more likely in collapsing African states than the appearance of a new force that can actually exercise sovereign authority over a defined piece of territory.

In response to the confused situation in some African countries, the institutional framework governing international organizations could be loosened. It would be particularly useful to encourage the participation by subnational units, be they potential breakaway regions or simply units such as towns or

50. See the report by consultants from the London School of Economics and Political Science, *A Study of Decentralised Political Structures for Somalia: A Menu of Options* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1995).

regions that have been largely abandoned by their own central government, in technical meetings, and later directly, in organizations such as the World Health Organization, UN International Children's Emergency Fund, and UN Development Program that provide resources directly for development.

Participation in technical and service delivery organizations by traditional leaders or "warlords," who currently exercise authority and may deliver services but are not sovereign, is appealing because international acceptance could be calibrated to the kind and conditions of power actually being exercised. Thus, if a region's schooling has become largely dependent on the leadership and funds provided by a traditional leader, he might develop some kind of formal relationship with the relevant UN agency. The agency would need to examine whether the new leaders are able to exercise their authority for a sustained period of time, and to make judgments about the degree of assistance based on human rights concerns, just as the international community does now for countries that seek aid. Such a stance might be more helpful to the people of a region than pretending the old political arrangements still work. If the government of a country objects to losing authority, it should be forced to prove that it can actually govern the region.

Making critical international institutions more flexible would be more important than having the General Assembly or other highly political organizations begin to recognize subnational ethnic groups.⁵¹ Because it is the source of sovereignty, highly visible, and political, recognition by the General Assembly is probably the last step for a region or group of people breaking away from their old nation-state. In the indeterminate position that some regions of some African countries will occupy, focusing on service delivery is more important.

The diplomacy of integrating non-state actors into what were previously clubs of sovereign nations would, of course, be difficult. However, in a variety of circumstances, the international community has proved adept at adapting to diplomacy with something other than the traditional sovereign states. As William Reno demonstrates, foreign companies have not been reluctant to deal with informal authority in Liberia and Sierra Leone, willing to work with anyone who has real rather than theoretical control over a territory.⁵² Similarly, while the international community does not, in general, recognize Taiwan as a

51. This is suggested by Gottlieb, *Nation against State*, p. 39.

52. See William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 128–182.

separate country, that has not stopped the vast majority of countries from having normal commercial relations with Taipei and, at times, what look suspiciously like diplomatic relations. Once the sovereignty issue has been addressed, it should not be that hard for technical agencies to begin relating to those units that are providing services. Indeed, such an approach would also be a logical, if still revolutionary, evolution from current practices that tacitly allow non-governmental organizations to cross borders during humanitarian crises without devoting much attention to the niceties of sovereignty.

DECERTIFYING FAILED STATES

A further step that the United States, and other countries, can take would be to formally recognize that some states are simply not exercising formal control over parts of their country and should no longer be considered sovereign. For instance, the U.S. government already decertifies countries, effectively reducing their eligibility for American aid, that are not attempting to stop the production and trans-shipment of narcotics. Indeed, the U.S. legislation goes further and demands that countries prevent and punish the laundering of drug-related profits and "bribery and other forms of public corruption which facilitate the production, processing or shipment" of drugs. Thus, Nigeria was decertified in part because it did not investigate any senior officials alleged by the United States to be involved with drugs.⁵³ The United States is effectively arguing that these countries are not executing their sovereign responsibilities in regard to the enforcement of their own laws. A similar decision could be reached if a state is not exercising other aspects of sovereign control, including the failure or inability to project authority in large parts of its territory over a long period of time. Using this criterion, the United States should finally recognize Zaire for what it is and decertify it as a sovereign nation. It should be no more difficult to ascertain that a state is not governing over parts of its own country than it is to determine that senior officials are involved in drug trafficking but are not being prosecuted.

Decertification would be a strong signal that something fundamental has gone wrong in an African country, and that parts of the international community are no longer willing to continue the myth that every state is always exercising sovereign authority. Concretely, decertification might trigger the

53. The relevant U.S. laws are cited in Committee on Foreign Affairs, *International Narcotics Control and United States Foreign Policy: A Compilation of Laws, Treaties, Executive Documents and Relevant Materials*, U.S. House of Representatives, December 1994, p. 31. The presidential message decertifying Nigeria can be found in *ibid.*, p. 543.

initiation of new efforts by other countries, including major donors and neighbors, at finding other leaders who are exercising control in parts of the country. Decertification would remove other privileges of sovereignty, including appointments to the rotating positions on the Security Council. It is paradoxical that the United States strongly opposed Libya's attempt to gain a seat on the Security Council because of its support for international terrorism, but seemingly had no problems with Zaire being on the United Nations' most powerful body despite that country's obvious dysfunctional nature.

Whatever concrete measures are taken, decertification would provide some avenue out of the current impasse, where there is no status to accord a country other than sovereignty irrespective of domestic realities. Decertification should be a rare step that would be used only as a last resort. Indeed, making decertification relatively difficult would also make its signal that much more powerful when it was used. Decertification would also have the advantage of correctly stating that the United States and other important actors understand that some countries are not sovereign, even if it is not clear what they are. Decertification could thus be a "halfway house" for countries that are at some later point able to reconstitute their sovereign authority. As such, it might be viewed not as a punishment but as a simple acknowledgment of reality. Alternatively, decertification could be the first step in recognizing that a state has died, if it ever lived, and that something else has to take its place.

It is an irony that the countries the United States does not recognize now (including Cuba, Iraq, Libya, and North Korea) are, by any measure, states. Indeed, the problem with those countries, according to the United States, is that their states have far too much control over their societies. In turn, African states that have little control over their societies continue to be recognized as states. Decertification would provide a way to avoid immediately categorizing those countries that have weak states with pariah countries like Libya or North Korea.

Decertification would require what the United States and other great powers dislike doing: altering the rules by which diplomacy is conducted. Great powers are notoriously conservative when it comes to the structure of the international system: witness the U.S. opposition to the breakup of the Soviet Union. No doubt, many diplomats would raise practical objections to decertification, arguing that it is against current practices of state-to-state relations. That is precisely the point. The situation in parts of Africa, and perhaps elsewhere in the developing world, has now diverged so dramatically from the legal fiction that it would actually be in the long-term interest of the great powers to create

a new category for states that really can no longer be considered sovereign. While decertification might apply to a very limited number of countries, those are precisely the countries that will inevitably occupy the time and attention of policymakers across the world who search for a solution to mass human suffering.

The idea that complex humanitarian disasters of the type experienced by Somalia and Liberia must, at some level, be the responsibility of the international community is a new phenomenon in international relations, and is at odds with the post-World War II notion of sovereignty for any territory that can achieve self-rule. Accordingly, new tools must be developed to deal with these problems, and the old practice of simply accepting that all countries must always be sovereign should be rejected. Decertification of some countries that have demonstrated an inability over a long period of time to rule their territories could be part of the new arsenal of techniques needed to address new problems the international community faces.

Conclusion

The international society has yet to acknowledge that some states simply do not work. Indeed, it will require significant effort simply to create an environment where the possibility of alternatives to the current nation-states is admitted. Ending the intellectual log-jam caused by the current insistence on retaining the old nation-states would allow Africans in particular to begin to develop, for the first time in over a century, indigenous plans for their nation-states. Given the extent of the problems in Africa's failing states, it would be incorrect to suggest that any innovation will be low-cost, or will be guaranteed to address the root causes of failure. However, the very magnitude of the problems affecting millions of people also suggests that the current emphasis on resuscitating states that have never demonstrated the capacity to be viable is a mistake.