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Fixing fragile states: a country-based framework

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Executive summary

Although there is growing awareness in the development field of the need to better assess fragile states and customise policies to their particular needs, there has been limited progress in these areas. The new Country Fragility Assessment Framework, which systematically examines the societal and institutional sources of fragility, can help decision-makers make more precise diagnoses and better target interventions. It builds on the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, but offers a more comprehensive framework to assess the forces that can drive a society together or apart. It does this by analysing 12 societal and institutional sources of fragility. The combination of poor social cohesion and poor institutionalisation yields a vicious cycle as instability and underdevelopment feed each other. Social divisions hamper efforts to improve governance and foster economic opportunity, which in turn create discontent and a zero-sum struggle for power and resources. As such, change must target one of these two elements. Even though the framework does not directly provide solutions, it can be used to suggest policy options that are most likely to work, or at least rule out some that will surely fail.

In recent years the international community has made progress in understanding the unique challenges fragile states face and strategising how these challenges might be overcome. But much more needs to be done.

More and more the world's strife and poverty cluster within the borders of fragile or failed states.[2] The conflicts such countries engender have increasingly become a direct threat to the international community: Syria has become a hotbed for extremists; Boko Haram threatens Nigeria's and the region's fortunes; instability in Libya has spilled over into Mali and the rest of the Sahel. Achieving international security and spreading prosperity depend on improving governance in fragile states.

Past efforts have yielded meagre returns. Despite massive foreign aid, international engagements in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have failed to end the vicious cycle of violent conflict, exclusion, and poverty that have long afflicted these countries.

These failures are not merely inevitable products of attempts to tackle intractable problems. Rather, they stem in part from a poor grasp of the nature of fragile states.

The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, an agreement forged between a set of fragile states and their international partners in 2011, holds much promise. Designed to improve how both governments and aid agencies approach the problems these countries face, as well as to improve cooperation between them, the New Deal focuses efforts on five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs). In contrast to past efforts, these prioritise issues that are much more likely to reduce fragility. The five PSGs are:

(1) *Legitimate politics:* Foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution.
(2) *Security:* Establish and strengthen people's security.
(3) *Justice:* Address injustices and increase people's access to justice.
(4) *Economic foundations:* Generate employment and improve livelihoods.

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2 By 2018 the proportion of the world's poor living in fragile states is expected to reach as many as one half. By 2030 it is expected to reach as many as two-thirds (Chandy et al., 2013).

Revenues and services: Manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

Notice that these goals are rather broad, so broad that they offer only a limited roadmap forward. They do not focus on causes, just results; leave out many important issues; and do not consider the driving dynamics that influence the goals that are included. There is no framework to assess what works well and thus might be leveraged to counter the sources of fragility.

The international community therefore needs to build on the New Deal with a fuller framework for understanding and addressing state fragility. The best approach will be rooted in a grasp of the societal and institutional dynamics that cause fragility in these countries.

In a nutshell, the causes of fragility are poor social cohesion and poor institutionalisation.[3] More precise diagnoses of how these causes operate in the unique circumstances of particular countries will yield better targeted and more effective remedies.

My contribution is to offer a new Country Fragility Assessment Framework to help decision-makers formulate such diagnoses.

Misdiagnosing fragility

And better diagnoses *are* needed. The international community's approach to fragility is confused. Widely cited fragility checklists[4] feature items that do not cause fragility (such as population growth and income levels), and in fact may be caused by it (such as violence and corruption).

Proposed solutions often revolve around promoting Western concepts of democracy and human rights, but such considerations, however noble, can in truth have little practical relevance until a state has acquired a modicum of cohesion and institutionalisation. Before you can have a democratic state you must have a state that is more than a frail shadow.

Frustration with flawed international strategies led in 2010 to the formation of the g7+, a group of 20 countries that self-identify as fragile states and which have banded together in order to share experiences and engage with donors.[5]

The g7+ seeks to broaden the agenda pursued by the international community in order to better address fragility's root causes (Hughes et al., 2014). It emphasises the need to enhance political dialogue in countries and to prioritise the five PSGs in policymaking. These PSGs stress principles that inform my concept of state fragility. Although it has had a large impact on the discourse around fragility, so far the g7+ has not changed the priorities of the donor community, which clearly diverge from those of leaders of the fragile world.

Do not overlook society

Structurally fragile states are not fainter copies of robust states. Instead, they are qualitatively different. With weak institutions and unbridgeable social divisions, they function according to different sociopolitical dynamics than do robust states. This means that fragile states face uniquely formidable obstacles to stability, development and democracy. They are trapped in a vicious cycle as instability and underdevelopment feed each other. Social divisions hamper efforts to improve governance and foster economic opportunity, which in turn creates discontent and a zero-sum struggle for power and resources.

Although the state is a key actor, its function is largely a product of how groups in society relate to one another – and to it. State capacity matters, but the functioning of the state is strongly influenced by the dynamics of the society in which it is embedded. Social cohesion is especially important in less developed countries because formal institutions are so weak.

When formal institutions are weak, social cohesion can to a certain extent substitute to encourage leaders to resolve problems with amicability and a public spirit, as has happened at crucial points in the histories of places such as Somaliland, Chile and Tunisia. Moreover, without social cohesion it is very hard to improve formal institutions – the approach typically advocated by donors – because elites and officials and the groups they represent have strong incentives to undermine reform (because it can harm their interests).

On the other hand, if a state is strongly institutionalised, these social fractures matter much less because government will be much more likely to act according to a principle of neutrality, and thus be a much better and fairer manager of conflict and distributor of resources.

The institutionalisation of the state is not synonymous with strong security forces: a country can have powerful security forces that only serve the interests of a particular clan, ethnic group or ruling clique. Rather, it is about the ability of political parties, large government ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and companies to effectively coordinate large numbers of people and departments, manage interactions with many other entities, and perform across many locations and over long periods of time.

3 For a fuller examination of how to identify fragile states, see Kaplan (2014).
4 See, for example, those formulated by the Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy* (which together publish the Fragile States Index), the Political Instability Task Force (originally the State Failure Task Force), the Brookings Institution, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, or the Institute for Economics and Peace.
5 See <http://www.g7plus.org/>.

Seen this way, fragility can be understood as existing along two dimensions (see Figure 1), with low institutionalisation and low social cohesion at one corner (occupied by countries such as Somalia, the Central African Republic and South Sudan), and cohesive, highly institutionalised nation states occupying the opposite one. Systems marked by low political fragmentation and high institutionalisation (category I in Figure 1), as in the case of almost all developed countries and developing countries such as Turkey, China and Chile, are genuinely robust. Only this group is capable of fully tackling the challenges of development. Political systems with low fragmentation and institutionalisation (category II) are relatively stable, but sluggish. These have potentially bright futures if they can foster investment and improve state capacity. States with high identity fragmentation but also high state-coercive abilities (category III), such as the Soviet Union or Uzbekistan, are inherently weak and potentially unstable. States that combine low institutionalisation (especially in the security realm) with highly fragmented political cultures (category IV) are fundamentally weak and unstable. Fragile states are concentrated in categories III and IV. For more information on this system of categorisation, see Kaplan (2014).

Figure 1: Four types of political orders (with selected examples)

	Low political-identity fragmentation	High political-identity fragmentation
High institutionalisation (or at least high coercive capacity)	*I: Dynamic* Botswana Turkey Chile China	*III: Fragile but controlled* Syria (before 2011) Soviet Union Iraq (before 2003) Saudi Arabia Uzbekistan
Low institutionalisation	*II: Stable but sluggish* Senegal Armenia Tanzania Bangladesh	*IV: Fragile and unstable* Nigeria DRC Somalia Libya (after 2011) Syria (after 2011)

States toward the "fragile and unstable" corner are trapped in a vicious cycle of societal fragmentation and weak institutions. Escape is difficult. The combination of rigid social divisions and weak state institutions in Lebanon, Libya and Yemen, for instance, means that institutions become arenas for power struggles that can turn violent. In African countries such as Nigeria and Kenya, the state may boast islands of effectiveness, but more generally lacks the autonomy and capacity to manage conflict and boost development, bending instead to competitive power dynamics in society.

These underlying dynamics affect how economies, politics, security establishments, administrative organs and legal systems perform. The more cohesive the country, the more likely these will work inclusively and without crippling bias. In fragile states, by contrast, institutions will be open to capture or corruption. It is virtually impossible to construct sturdy formal institutions in places such as Afghanistan or Somalia without addressing the social cleavages that threaten to rip them apart.

A new framework

In recent years analysts have developed sophisticated tools to analyse many political and economic features, but *not* systemic fragility (as defined here) and the deep cleavages that underlie it.[6] Assessments (such as those produced for the Dutch government and European Union) have sought to identify power dynamics, conflict triggers and governance patterns, but not the key centrifugal forces driving societies apart.[7] The many indices and lists that claim to gauge fragility do not try to produce comprehensive assessments for individual countries, but merely provide an ordinal ranking. Worse, these rankings often conflate resilience (or luck) with true robustness, characterising as non-fragile states that have enjoyed an accidental (and deceptive) quiet while sitting atop combustible societies. These lists have repeatedly done a poor job of predicting conflict or state failure: many of the Arab countries now in turmoil (e.g. Libya, Bahrain) did not make these lists before 2011 (Kaplan, 2014).

The New Deal's fragility assessments are better (International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, 2014), but still limited by how the PSGs frame the issues[8] and too

6 Some of these tools have been used to analyse fragile states from a political economic perspective. See Mcloughlin (2012). But none focuses on the sources of fragility as I do here.
7 See, for instance, Initiative for Peacebuilding (2008).
8 Two of the PSGs (#4 Economic Foundations and #5 Revenues and Services) are more developmental in nature. The other three are excellent, but are a rather narrow base with which to work.

prone to politicisation (because governments will be responsible for undertaking them). Prediction will always be an inexact science, but a framework that more accurately distinguishes precipitants from products of crisis could do more to help reduce the likelihood of conflict, foster inclusive politics and produce greater prosperity across the universe of fragile states.

Certainly, the importance of better fragility assessments is increasingly recognised across the development community due to the growing awareness of the need to better understand the dynamics in and better customise policy responses to fragile states. The New Deal places assessments at the centre of its agenda. The World Bank is rethinking how it undertakes and uses assessments, and leading donors are moving in this direction. The 2015 annual Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development report on fragile states repeatedly "highlights the need for new approaches to assessing and monitoring fragility using metrics that do not reduce fragility measures to a single index but rather allow for tracking across multiple (and potentially uncorrelated) dimensions" (OECD, 2015: 45).[9] But past – first-generation – attempts to undertake assessments have not achieved the desired results.

The Country Fragility Assessment Framework aims to fill this gap. Based on more than ten years of research into fragile states, it focuses on the forces that can drive a society together or apart. It does this by analysing 12 societal and institutional sources of fragility (see Table 1). The tool can also be used to roughly gauge a country's degree of fragility in order to make cross-national and inter-temporal comparisons, although the highly qualitative nature of the metrics may limit the precision of such measurements. Even though the framework does not directly provide solutions, it can be used to suggest policy options that are most likely to work, or at least rule out some that will surely fail.

The Country Fragility Assessment Framework gauges the forces working on the various groups and institutions that exist in these unconsolidated countries. Many of the issues it examines are structural in nature, making them difficult, although not impossible to change in the short term. Others are more amenable in the middle term. There are 12 components in all. Although all are a product of both of the two dimensions of fragility discussed above, five are largely influenced by societal factors and five are largely influenced by institutional factors. The other two are more a balanced combination of both dimensions.

Predominantly influenced by societal sources

The component *political dynamics* covers how groups mobilise and what narrative drives their actions. When political organisation and rhetoric become rooted in ethnic, religious, regional or social identity divisions and starkly different narratives about the past, present and future built around these, a country is far more likely to be fragile (e.g. Iraq) than if political competition is conducted across such groups with leaders appealing to similar audiences (e.g. Indonesia). This factor lies at the heart of fragility, because it strongly influences other factors and is strongly influenced by them in turn. If these other variables are not a problem, it is unlikely that political dynamics will be either.

Historical covers how the past influences the actions of leaders and groups today. Rigid subnational identities, difficult population geographies (e.g. different ethnic groups living in different parts of a country) and memories of past conflicts are all hard to change, especially in the short term. Any lingering resentment, trauma or other grievance can make conflict much more likely (as in the Balkans, the Levant, and Africa's Great Lakes region). It can also make the rise of sectarian or divisive leaders more likely. On the other hand, societies that have shared a long history as a nation – Egypt and Iran, for example – have a much stronger sense of nationhood, which is a powerful centripetal force.

Social cooperation looks at how people work (or do not work) together across different groups nationally, and locally in communities. Do marriages span social groups? Do members of different groups easily do business with each other? Do they live in the same neighbourhoods? Play together? Go to school together? Do many organisations include people from different backgrounds? On an intra-group level, are communities adapting to social change (by, for instance, creating new institutions)? Are they finding ways to offer youth enough opportunity to satisfy them? Are indigenous groups and migrants cooperating on public goods and the division of resources? If mistrust either between or within different communities is high, then the capacity to bring people together to solve common problems will be limited. If anomie is common due to the breakdown of communal structures or large generation gaps, then more youth will join gangs or militant groups.

Horizontal inequalities considers whether there are significant political, economic and sociocultural inequalities (e.g. representation in government, the quality of public services, land ownership, income levels, recognition of holidays, the use of language) between major groups or regions. These issues – or at least the perception of them – have major consequences for whether people feel they are being treated justly, in turn affecting whether they believe that the government is legitimate.

Transnational influences looks at how external actors, events and ideas affect domestic dynamics. Geopolitics, for instance, plays a major role in how countries near Russia evolve and how groups act and how powerful they are in

9 It also includes a recommended numerical framework for breaking down the different dimensions of fragility. But it suffers from the same problems of every quantitative system for analysing fragility.

divided countries such as Lebanon and Bahrain. This component also plays a role in setting international norms on governance and human rights. Ideas – especially with regard to political ideology or religion – can span borders. Instability can be similarly contagious, as the conflicts in Libya and the Sahel illustrate. International markets can also have an impact, such as when a rise in the price of food impoverishes part of a population or when a drop in oil prices weakens a government's ability to distribute rents.

Predominantly influenced by institutional sources

The component *effectiveness and interaction of institutions* includes some areas that are widely studied, such as the ability of state institutions to deliver public goods (e.g. the rule of law) and others that are rarely considered important (e.g. the interaction between customary and formal institutions). The more effective a country's myriad formal and informal institutions – and the better they work together – the greater their capacity to deliver public goods and constructively arbitrate differences between groups, both of which are essential to legitimacy.

Equity of institutions looks at whether formal and informal institutions act inclusively or exclusively. Do they discriminate against or exclude certain groups or the poor? Do they unfairly allow one group to enrich themselves at the expense of other groups? There is much overlap between this component and the previous one, but they are separated because the causes and implications can differ substantially. The less equitably institutions act the more resentment they will arouse and the more divisive politics is likely to be.

Perceptions of justice examines whether groups believe that their situation now and their treatment in the past were fair or not. Groups often have different criteria for judging fairness, whether grounded in respect, process, or inclusion and voice. Such perceptions greatly influence how they interpret various policies and programmes. The better institutions are at providing equal opportunity for mediation and recourse, the more likely everyone will feel a sense of justice and the state will be viewed as legitimate.

Security covers the pervasiveness of violence and the likelihood that subnational political groups use it in pursuit of power. A sense of insecurity can easily weaken social cohesion and drive groups to reduce cooperation with each other out of fear. It can augment segregation (as in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq during their wars), making cooperation even less likely. If any group unilaterally uses coercion against other elements in society to intimidate or capture power – such as Hizbullah in Lebanon and the militaries in Egypt, Pakistan and Myanmar – politics cannot be equitable. The state needs to have a monopoly of violence and exercise it in ways that advance inclusiveness.

Accountability mechanisms looks at the ability of formal and informal institutions and processes to hold leaders accountable. These institutions include organs of the state, such as courts and corruption-prevention agencies, as well as non-state organisations, including civil society, political parties and NGOs. The processes include elections, taxation, and the informal ties between leaders and populations. Norms can have an outsized impact here: the more legitimacy and public support depend on upholding certain minimal standards of conduct and due process, the more likely the rights of individuals, minorities and groups out of power will be protected. The strength and unifying power of institutions matter too: in many countries these are too weak to play constructive roles. In some cases leaders only become accountable to a subset of the population, as in Iraq, Haiti, Syria and elsewhere.

Combination of both dimensions

Breadth of economic activity examines how large, wide, and inclusive is the productive structure – and thus the revenue base – of a country. The broader and more encompassing of different ethnic, religious, regional, and social groups, the more likely political actors will favour conciliation towards their rivals and initiatives that strengthen institutions (such as the rule of law). The smaller and narrower the base, the more likely leaders will be inclined to act exclusively. A heavy reliance on natural resources, for instance, makes power more zero sum, and gives leaders both the wherewithal and incentive to undermine institutions and whatever cooperation across groups exists.

Behaviour of leaders examines whether political, economic, and social leaders act in ways that bring people together or whether they promote a narrow agenda that weakens cohesion and institutions. This depends largely on the effectiveness of various accountability mechanisms (including, but not limited to, elections) and whether these are broad based and inclusive. Agency is important, but the other 11 sources of fragility discussed above often constrain the set of choices available to leaders. The more they reward sectarian behaviour, the more likely leaders will act accordingly.

Power is very unevenly distributed in these countries: in many cases a small number of important political, economic, social, and religious actors have a disproportionate influence on what their groups do and what other groups are able to do. Ordinary citizens typically have little or no control over the state, and the state itself is limited in its ability to make or implement policy independently of these elites.

The relative importance of each category varies by country. In some countries, strong identity groups and starkly divided politics may be the greatest challenges (e.g. Iraq). In others, horizontal inequalities may create such anger that they matter most (e.g. Kenya). In yet others, weak institutions and insecurity make it very hard to bring groups together at all (e.g. Libya). However, none of these elements works in isolation. Instead, they tend to reinforce each other, for better or worse. Action on multiple fronts will be needed.

Table 1: Sources of fragility: the Country Fragility Assessment Framework

CATEGORY	TYPE	AREA OF ANALYSIS
Political dynamics	Societal	Political discourse – uniting or dividing at crucial moments Political narrative – overarching or particular to each group Political mobilisation – by or across groups Media – unified or separate for each group
Historical	Societal	Historical legacies Unresolved trauma State organic or imposed? Political geography Rigidity of identity boundaries
Social cooperation	Societal	Relationships (personal/work/family) across or within groups Political, economic and social associations – across or within groups Trust between groups Socialisation/integration of youth Population movements (tensions with host communities) Strength/flexibility of traditional institutions
Horizontal inequalities	Societal	Political inequalities (e.g. representation in government, the military, etc.) Economic inequalities (e.g. quality of public services, land ownership, income levels, etc.) Sociocultural inequalities (e.g. recognition of holidays, use of language, etc.) How do groups perceive political, economic and sociocultural inequalities? Why do these perceptions differ from reality?
Transnational influences	Societal	How do regional events shape elite behaviour and population expectations? Are external actors providing weapons and money to particular groups in a society? How are prices for commodities affecting different segments of society? How are transnational ideas and norms affecting how religious and political actors behave?
Effectiveness and interaction of institutions	Institutional	How well do institutions (state and non-state) deliver public goods? Are they relevant for the needs of the disadvantaged? What is the quality of interactions among different institutions? Can public and civil society institutions bring people together across cleavages? How well do (often-informal) local governance systems work with (formal) regional and national systems? Are institutions robust enough to enforce elite commitments?
Equity of institutions	Institutional	Do state institutions act impersonally, equitably and inclusively? Do civil servants prioritise private over public? Do different types of people receive different treatment from the state? Do all groups and regions receive equal public services?
Perceptions of justice	Institutional	How do elites and groups feel they are being treated by the state? How do elites and groups feel they have been treated historically? How effective are institutions at managing conflict? What does justice mean to each group? Can they achieve it?
Security	Institutional	Weapons/violence: how do they affect political competition? Security of various groups Does the state security apparatus favour any side? Does the state have a monopoly on violence?
Accountability mechanisms	Institutional	How dependent is the state on taxes from the population and business? How capable are institutions (including political parties, NGOs, courts, etc.) and processes (e.g. elections) of holding leaders accountable? Do accountability mechanisms bring people together across groups or divide them by group? What are widely accepted human rights norms?
Breadth of economic activity	Both	Dependency on natural resources Does one group dominate economic activity? How diversified and broad is a country's productive economic activity? Can the economy generate opportunity for youth?
Behaviour of leaders	Both	Do national leaders act inclusively or exclusively? Do group leaders depend on or promote a sectarian agenda? Do leaders of political parties and other major political organisations depend on broad or narrow support? Are accountability mechanisms based on all groups or just leaders' own?

Assessments should be carried out independently of political actors – including governments and donors – to ensure the validity of results. They should take into account variations at the national, regional, and local levels, as well as between different societal groups, and examine differences across the broad range of institutions, seeking out islands of excellence, as well as problems with performance, interactions and inequities. They should yield a comprehensive strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis for each country, as well as a set of short-term and long-term recommendations. The assessments should be repeated regularly and include analysis of potential conflict triggers, including upcoming events, regional dynamics, international markets, migration and natural disasters. And they should ideally be undertaken in a way that engages key stakeholders – especially local political, economic and social leaders – and creates a document that is useful to domestic development actors and their international partners. This can be done through roundtables, interviews, the establishment of advisory committees and so on. The more an assessment can synthesise deep expert analysis with broad consultation and provide its recommendations in an easily accessible form, the more likely it will be able to meet the needs of a broad range of different actors.

Mapping the components onto the PSGs

The 12 components discussed above can be mapped onto the five PSGs. But whereas the PSGs are distinct objectives, the assessment components are interrelated phenomena. As such, some components play important roles in multiple PSGs; most play some role in all of them.

The framework can also be used to create indicators to measure progress toward the PSGs. Each component can be broken down into five to ten questions that can be answered to produce a "score" on that factor. Combining the tallies yield totals for the particular goal. Of course, given that the focus of the PSGs is goals and the framework is dynamics, these grades have different meanings from evaluations focused only on the five PSG goals. An approach blending measurements of progress on the phenomena examined in the Assessment Framework with measurements of progress on the PSGs would enable international actors to build on their commitment to the g7+ process while providing a broader set of instruments to assess fragility.

The distinction between the Assessment Framework and the PSGs embodies the tension between two approaches to gauging the fragility of various countries. By focusing on distinct goals, the PSGs are looking at outcomes, with little to say how about they might be achieved. In contrast, the Assessment Framework focuses on the underlying dynamics that shape each state's prospects for development. Outcomes are seen as products (or symptoms) of these dynamics. Each manifestation of fragility included in the Assessment Framework can be targeted for amelioration with context-specific policies and programmes in a way that the PSGs cannot. As such, the framework provides more practicable information than do the PSGs. Of course, in both cases the challenges of reforming countries such that they become more inclusive are anything but straightforward and can be expected to face myriad obstacles.

Formal institutions and processes – including constitutions, courts and elections – are likely to feature much more prominently in a goals-based approach than one focused on underlying societal and institutional dynamics.

The differences between the two approaches are partly cultural: whereas setting clear goals is a typical Western technique for overcoming challenges, focusing on improving relationships and the often-informal mechanisms that enhance these is a typical strategy in many non-Western countries.[10] The framework thus reflects a clear predisposition for a non-Western approach to peacebuilding and statebuilding: fragility can only be overcome when a certain degree of social harmony and agreement on the rules for coexistence have been achieved.

Addressing sources, not symptoms

Fragile states require a pragmatic approach, one that focuses much more on the underlying sociopolitical and institutional drivers of conflicts than is currently the case. Countries must look for creative approaches that address the particular sources of fragility that appear in each context. This includes looking for innovative ways to enhance accountability, inclusiveness, equity and justice beyond what attempts to simply reproduce what the Western template provides.

Policymakers need to be flexible and agile while taking a long-term perspective when looking to achieve these aims. Unfortunately, the trend in donor circles is towards short-term, rigid programming that can be easily evaluated – the very opposite of what is needed in fragile contexts.

Policies to address state fragility should target the type of fragility existing in the target country. The increasing international emphasis on fragility assessments reflects the growing awareness of the need to better target countermeasures. The New Deal places them at the centre of its agenda.

Some issues will lend themselves more easily to a solution (e.g. security, which affects everyone), while others will not (e.g. equity of institutions, which may hurt some while helping others). Sometimes only interim or partial solutions will be possible. Every situation is different: no fixed

10 For the contrast between Western and non-Western ways of thinking, see, among others, Nisbett et al. (2001); Henrich et al. (2010); Nisbett (2003); and Nisbett and Masuda (2003).

formula or method of prioritisation will work everywhere. While some countries will have substantial obstacles to reform, the current success of countries/regions such as Malaysia, Northern Ireland, Indonesia and South Africa despite their histories of conflict shows what is possible.

Bolstering deeply troubled states and societies is a task that is both urgent and incredibly daunting. Recognising the extent of the challenges and the diversity of fragile states illustrates that any generalised remedy for state fragility is no more credible than alchemy. Addressing state fragility in its many shapes requires understanding the specific dimensions of each country and tailoring policies to fit them.

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