Fixing to take on failed, failing states

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n the past two decades, failed, failing, and fragile states have grown in number and notoriety and are, for various reasons, a priority for development agencies, military defense and security communities. Academics and policy-makers have spent a considerable amount of time and resources trying to understand both the causes and the consequences of fragility. They are still uncertain how to properly engage states affiliated with it. As a result, several donor countries, including Canada, have created specific units and funding envelopes within their bureaucracies in the hope that such mainstreaming will be enough to counter the myriad challenges fragile states pose.

At the same time, international organizations such as the World Bank and the OECD have also been funding research and providing policy advice. Overall, the resulting research and policy contributions have led to an increased emphasis on human security, state-building, transnational governance, integrated approaches between development and security, and the “notion” that the international community can promote development by moving beyond its humanitarian first-aid paradigm that was in vogue in the 1990s.

Through extensive research, we now know that fragile states are so because they are weak in the legitimacy, authority and capacity, and not just because they suffer from ongoing conflict and violence. The recent upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia are testaments to that fact. Although there is limited consensus on the precise meaning of the term “fragility,” there is no doubt that the 30 to 40 so-called fragile states in the world represent a danger to their own populations in terms of well-being, and potential costs to economic growth, stability and the international community. It is also now well-known that most of the MDGs will not be met globally by the 2015 target date because of a lack of progress in fragile states—even though net aid to the 43 fragile states identified by the International Network on Conflict and Fragility amounted to more than US$41 billion in just 2008.

In our own work, through Carleton University’s Country Indicators for Foreign Policy project, we have repeatedly argued that aid to fragile states is too volatile and poorly targeted, and that donors need to move from a reactive to a preventive change in attitude. A long-term and sustained international effort is needed if permanent progress is to be achieved in fragile countries’ situations.

To that end, it is clear there is a need for more people who are trained specifically to think and act as leaders in the state, regional and community levels.

For those contemplating such work, applications are now being accepted for the critically important opportunity to develop the skills and cultural awareness, there are a number of things they can do to help prepare themselves for such situations. The first and perhaps least obvious is the need to improve analytical and diagnostic skills. Second is the need to develop the policy and institutional environment in which you are expected to work and the third requirement is to acquire practical skills such as mediation and negotiation. Social science departments at universities, including economics and political science, typically meet some of these theoretical and technical requirements.

But the very nature and complexity of a fragile-state environment necessitates an eclectic, if not interdisciplinary perspective—a perspective that is offered in only a few dedicated international public policy institutions, such as the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University, Laval University and the Balsillie School in Waterloo. By the same token, programs that typically focus on conflict and peace-building will only give a student a partial picture. Since fragility and failure are by definition a policy environment gone awry and where the issues that arise are not all related to violent conflict, there is also a need for policy analysis and prescription, and a sound knowledge of economics.

Simply put, programs that offer students a combination of elements that bridge theory and policy as well as different disciplines and policies such as conflict, development and international law offer the best chance to appreciate and understand the causes and sources of fragility, the dynamics of fragility processes, including stages, turning points and ripples, and the dynamics of state and party involvement, including stabilization, NGOs and the private sector.

As most students entering such programs will be new to the world of policy, they need to be practical assistants for decision-making, based on an understanding of techniques and forms of third-party engagement, including ethics and principles for effective engagement. With their large funding envelopes, donors are a powerful force that can do harm if there is a failure to assess the impact of their actions. Students must learn how to use policy knowledge of policy evaluation and know how to put into practice measurement processes.

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critical infrastructure systems continue to grow in complexity, interconnectivity, and interdependence, it is becoming increasingly difficult for one particular group of experts to successfully assure their safety and security. That’s why, in the last few years, a new area of protection, or CIP, is growing as a specialized field spanning several sectors of expertise.

Public Safety Canada defines national critical infrastructures as “processes, systems, facilities, networks, assets and services essential to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of Canadians and the effective functioning of government.”

The nation’s critical infrastructure includes energy and utilities, finance, food, transportation and government, as well as information and communication technology, health, water, safety and manufacturing. Protecting this infrastructure is of immense importance because failure to do so will jeopardize the safety, security, sovereignty, prosperity and credibility of the country.

Effective protection of our critical infrastructure requires competencies in a number of areas: security policy and governance; operations security; public security, information system security, emergency management; business continuity planning, infrastructure engineering design, security engineering and facility hardening. The Carleton University Critical Infrastructure Protection program is designed for the CIP triad of infrastructure protection and international security.

The CIP program is also appropriate for current security and infrastructure protection practitioners who are interested in enhancing their expertise in the protection of critical infrastructure.

The aim of any educational program in CIP is to provide an environment for students to develop or extend their expertise in CIP and to meet the complex theoretical and applied skills and knowledge required to protect critical infrastructures from risk. The program provides a unique graduate education stream for domestic and international students with backgrounds in history, political science, economics, engineering or natural sciences who wish to make a difference and serve the interests of their respective countries.

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Wayne Boone and Abass Braimah are assistant professors in the Critical Infrastructure Protection and International Security program at Carleton University. Professor Boone’s areas of study are security risk management, government and leadership; while professor Braimah focuses on infrastructure engineering. A list of educational programs can be found at www.carleton.ca/cip/

Lessons in protecting critical infrastructure

ENGINEERS, POLICY ANALYSTS AND SECURITY PRACTITIONERS work together and share their respective skills and knowledge in the completion of individual and group assignments, including Canadian Departments and Foreign Affairs assessments of actual critical infrastructures. The program provides a unique graduate education stream for domestic and international students with backgrounds in history, political science, economics, engineering or natural sciences who wish to make a difference and serve the interests of their respective countries.

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