



Threat from failed states more perceived than real

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An oft quoted adage says lies travel almost half the world before truth can put its shoes on. Lies, damn lies have always been the bedrock of the American foreign policy. From World War II until now, more so in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the United States has been framing its foreign policies on perceived threats to its security. First were the Communists and now are the failed states. And worst, almost half the world, especially the whole of Western Europe, have bought the lies virtually without questioning.

With the end of the Cold War the Communists suddenly ceased to be an existential threat to the United States and Western Europe. But the enemy did not die nor did animosity. The threat perception transformed and the Communists were replaced by failed states which, the United States says, are spawning terrorism.

The premise was what the former Cato Institute foreign policy analyst Gary Dempsey aptly articulated saying "if only we (United States) could populate the planet with 'good' states, we could eradicate international conflicts and terrorism".

In the United States the conviction that "lack of freedom in one state endangers the peace and freedom of others, and ... failed states are a refuge and breeding ground of extremism," took deep roots especially in the post 9/11 period.

The phantom of terrorism and failed states began to haunt Uncle Sam since the heydays of Cold War. The strategy and the US foreign policy plank, therefore, is not just to gather information and intelligence about America's enemies but also what the United States National Security Strategy released in September 2002, a year after the 9/11 attacks, said: "to bolster the growth of democracy and sustain peaceful democratic state".

This spectre that failed states are security threats to the United States and its allies in Western Europe explains America's over enthusiasm to undertake nation building efforts, make its foreign policy look more like unsolicited social works, undertaking vague and ill conceived missions in

remote locales like Haiti, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Somalia, etc.

And all these owe attribution to a flawed American perception of approaching anarchy from failed states and threats they supposedly pose to its existence. But the question is, are really the failed states pose security threats to the United States and its allies or for that matter to any nation. And we believe that it is time that we take a closer and harder look into a myth that the subsequent American presidents have so carefully build up.

George W. Bush was unequivocal in his assertion claiming that the United States and the world was "threatened less by conquering states than ... by failing ones". Even Robert Gates echoed his former president saying " in the next 20 years, the gravest threats to America will come from failing states that cannot meet the basic needs — much less the aspirations — of their people".

The inherent flaws of the concept could not have been starker. Contrary to what the American leaders have traditionally propagated neither the Communists nor the failed states ever posed that serious a security threat either to the United States or to the world.

In his book, *Weak Links*, foreign policy scholar Stewart Patrick has been unequivocal in his conclusion that "a middle-ranking group of weak but not yet failing (or failed) states (e.g., Kenya, Pakistan) may offer long-term advantages to terrorists than either anarchic zones or strong states". Patrick has exploded the America's myth about failed states.

As a matter of fact, the role of failed states in harbouring global terrorism appears increasingly a hyperbole. Undeniably, a few such states do pose threats but to generalise the issue is perhaps a bigger threat, which in long run may lay foundations of neo colonialism.

The Democratic Republic of Congo offers us a classic example in our study into the nexus between failed states and global terrorism. Conservative estimate says that at least five millions have already died in waves of violence that have convulsed the country since the middle of 1990s. Congo certainly is the single most horrific instance of utterly failed state. And yet it hasn't really posed any perceptible threat either the United States or to the world.

In fact, 13 of the top 20 failed states pose no direct or serious threat of exporting terrorism. It is not that they don't have terrorism. The terrorism these states have, pose more dangers to their domestic societies than to the world and least to the United States. They are certainly much less a threat to the world than some weak and functional ones which are still not categorised as failed.

Incubation of terrorism and its global export need infrastructure, which cannot be found in failed states. Weaker states, therefore, offers the best option with their ever complying security forces, banking system, air connectivity, ports, rampant corruption among bureaucrats and politicians

and opportunities for money laundering. After all, the 9/11 attacks though were directed from Afghanistan were financed and coordinated from Europe and some stable countries in Asia.