

# FAILING STATES IN A FAILED PARADIGM

Discourse analysis on the evolution of failed state discourse in the security strategies of the United States and the United Kingdom from the early 1990s until present time.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. With the millennial change begins a new era

October 7<sup>th</sup> 2001, British and American bombs rain down on Afghan territory, targeting Taliban and al-Qaeda strongholds. Operation Enduring Freedom has just begun.<sup>1</sup> Unaware of the controversy this military invasion will create in later days, support for Operation Enduring Freedom is extensive. Only a month has passed since the largest terrorist attack on American soil in history took place. On September the 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, members of al-Qaeda hijacked four airplanes departing from Boston, Washington D.C. and Newark with the intention of using them as unconventional, yet deadly weapons. Within a few hours, the entire world would watch the Twin Towers in New York collapse, the Pentagon in Washington D.C. in flames and a plane wreck shattered across a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. These events resulted in the loss of nearly 3,000 lives, making it the largest loss of life due to a terrorist attack on U.S. soil up until this date.<sup>2</sup> The American people were left hurt, in shock and in tremendous grief. Though it was apparent that from that day on, there would be a world *before* and *after* 9/11, little was known on how far consequences would reach. The United States and the international community felt an inappeasable need to hold someone accountable in order to possibly make sense of this horrible act of terror. The world needed to know who it was exactly that meant them harm. Logically, immediately after the attacks all eyes were pointed at the one person whose words could possibly bring resilience back into the spirit of the country and its people. This is where President George Bush stepped in to provide the redeeming word.

When he addressed the Joint Session of Congress and the American People on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001 – only 9 days after the attacks – he declared his now (in)famous statement: ‘And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.’<sup>3</sup> In saying this, President Bush provided the American citizens and the international community with very simple yet satisfactory conditions for retaliation: either you are on ‘our’ side, or you side with the terrorists and become our enemy. The first state that was called to account on this matter

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<sup>1</sup> CNN, ‘Operation Enduring Freedom Fast Facts’ <<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/28/world/operation-enduring-freedom-fast-facts/>> [accessed on 12-4-2017].

<sup>2</sup> BBC, ‘The 9/11 terrorist attacks’ <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/the\\_september\\_11th\\_terrorist\\_attacks](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/the_september_11th_terrorist_attacks)> [accessed on 18-4-2017].

<sup>3</sup> President George W. Bush, ‘Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People’, *The White House* <<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>> [accessed on 02-04-2017].

was Afghanistan. Around that time, it had just become apparent that al-Qaeda had been able to plan and carry out the attacks of 9/11 under protection of the Taliban, the ruling regime in Afghanistan. Following the attacks, the Taliban refused to extradite Osama Bin Laden (head of al-Qaeda) to the United States and did not seem willing to locate other prominent members of the terrorist organization.<sup>4</sup> This unwillingness to locate and combat the terrorist group led the United States to conclude that Afghanistan was no longer able to function in the international community and to control its own territory because of the turmoil caused by its ruler – the Taliban. This is how Afghanistan came to be labelled as a ‘failed state.’ Traditionally, failed states were not seen as threats to international peace. More so as states in need of international support to restore local stability. 9/11 proved to be a major turning point in history in this logic, since from that moment failed states were seen as harbors for terrorists and a launching pad for their operations.<sup>5</sup> And after the world had just witnessed how far these launching pads could reach, being labelled a ‘failed state’ suddenly equaled being the enemy.

Though this may seem quite logical and not shocking at all, it created an unprecedented situation. Becoming an enemy to international peace and stability when failed as a state now legitimized the international community to undertake any action to restore peace and stability. This legitimization was found in Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. This Chapter is devoted to any action taken by the U.N. with respect to threats to peace, breaches of peace and acts of aggression. By nature of the U.N., action not including the use of armed forces is always more desirable than a military intervention. These actions range from economic sanctions to the severance of diplomatic relations. However, these measures sometimes prove insufficient to resolve a conflict. This is why Article 42 of Chapter VII proclaims: ‘Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.’<sup>6</sup> Through this Article, the international community ensures that it has the right to organize a military intervention when the threat to international security is severe enough. By framing failed states as a threat to international security, this Article now formed a legitimate validation for member states of the U.N. to

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<sup>4</sup> Alex Spillius, ‘We won’t hand over bin Laden, say defiant Taliban’, *The Telegraph* <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/1341340/We-wont-hand-over-bin-Laden-say-defiant-Taliban.html>> [accessed on 07-05-2017].

<sup>5</sup> Charles T Call, ‘The Fallacy of the ‘Failed State’, *Third World Quarterly* 29:8 (2008), 1491-1507, here 1493.

<sup>6</sup> Charter of the United Nations, Chapter VII, Article 42.

intervene in failed states in order to prevent a local power vacuum from spreading and damaging international peace and security.

## **1.2. The inception of the failed state framework**

The origin of the framework behind the ‘state failure’ concept dates back to the beginning of the 1990s. At the time, the world had just witnessed a rapid decay of the communist ideology which led the Soviet Union to collapse by the end of the 1980s. After the world had feared for a ‘World War III’ for many decades, the diminished East-West tensions soon made it common belief in the Western world that great conflicts like the ones witnessed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century belonged to the past. It seemed as if ‘liberal democracy’ had ensured its ultimate victory. The United States quickly adapted to its superior position in the now unipolar political system while former Communist states were busy establishing democracies. A shift in polarity, the rapid growth in nation-states and the sense of ‘security’ after decades of fighting a Cold War also made the international community shift its focus from fighting wars to conflict resolution. After decades of fighting proxy wars – wars in which neither side of the ‘entities at war’ directly engage with one another – focus was transferred to peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. Instigated by a revival of optimism, the idea that every state, anywhere in the world, should be able to thrive, prosper and develop itself became a popular one. As a consequence, around this time an increasing number of scholars started thinking about the different requirements under which a state could be seen as a ‘success’ and in line with this – a ‘failure.’

This was not the first time in history that academics paid attention to statecraft. In earlier days, state success would mostly be measured by the survival or disintegration of a state. However, in the period between World War II and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the international community developed a growing interest in the well-being of people all over the world. Requirements for ‘good governance’ broadened and the international community started getting more involved in ensuring compliance of governments with these requirements. States were no longer merely ought to keep law and order, but they needed to provide their people with a good living as well. As a result, the bar was set higher and higher for states to be found ‘successful’. The interest in national and international state success only intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when many new states established itself and were ought to comply with these renewed, higher demands for good governance. Demand grew for a framework by which state

success could be measured in order to judge if a state was complying with these renewed thresholds of ‘good governance.’

Around the 1990s and responding to this demand, it did not take long for scholars to come up with a concept describing states unable to meet these stricter demands. This is how the term **failed state** was created and entered U.S. political lexicon in the early 1990s. Here, it slowly rooted itself and developed to obtain a prominent place in international peace and security.<sup>7</sup> At the time (in general), a state was deemed ‘failed’ when the structure, authority and law and order in it had fallen apart. Though it was already clear that failed states could have an impact on global security, traditionally they were not perceived as hostile. Rather, the international community saw them as entities in need of developmental assistance.<sup>8</sup> It was the international communities’ altruistic duty to ensure that these failing states were able to (re-) establish state structures similar to the liberal democracies in the Western world. Departing from the post-colonial idea that the sovereignty and self-governance of states was the most important virtue, Western states slowly started getting involved again with failing ones – even when functioning well in the international system, but when they simply failed to maintain domestic stability. The ‘West’ slowly came to feel responsible for ensuring domestic control and good governance of all states over its citizens and territory. This investment of the international community with failing states was then still funded by the selfless wish that every state could reach the ‘ideal’ form of regime, namely a liberal democracy.

This posture changed dramatically on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Through the attacks it became apparent that domestic instability elsewhere in the world could result in terror and chaos ‘at home.’ With this understanding, the interpretation of what it meant to the world when a state failed changed and the motivation behind investment in failed states shifted from altruism to self-defense. The changing discourse surrounding the concept of ‘failed states’ forms the focal point within this master’s thesis.

### **1.3. On discourse and the way it shapes our world**

One might wonder why it is important to study the interpretation of words. What is the benefit of knowing how a certain ‘term’ or ‘concept’ has changed over time? This has to do with the

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<sup>7</sup> Call, ‘Fallacy of ‘Failed State’, 1491.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald B. Helman, Steven R. Ratner, ‘Saving Failed States’, *Foreign Policy* 89:3 (1992), 3-20, here 6.

meaning of *discourse*. To most people, discourse means something as little as communication between a set of people. In the scientific field however, discourse describes all forms of communication and can roughly be defined as ‘a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world).’<sup>9</sup> In our daily communication, we make statements based on generally accepted knowledge. Knowledge that is mostly spread by powerful groups in society. The statements we make draw from certain assumptions that will most likely be accepted by others. Thus through our use of language, we reinforce those assumptions when agreeing with them, or challenge them when we do not. Either way, our communication contributes to determine what is commonly accepted knowledge at a given point in time.<sup>10</sup> This logic stems from the social constructionist idea, whereby we believe that the world around us is not an objective representation of facts, but rather a depiction of what a certain group of people at a certain point in time have agreed on being reality. This does not mean that reality does not exist, but that our access to reality is thus always through language. This makes language not merely a channel, but rather a machine that generates the social world around us.<sup>11</sup> Studying the process of language shaping reality and our social world is what discourse analysis is concerned with.

The founding father of discourse analysis is French philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault.<sup>12</sup> Just like later discourse-theorists, Foucault believed that the world we live in is structured by our knowledge. This means, certain powerful people and social groups are able to create discourses about our world which later turn into ‘regimes of truths’ when adopted by enough people. Discourse analysis analyzes such ‘regimes of truth,’ for instance by focusing on the development, demise and recurrence of certain statements.<sup>13</sup> What makes the analysis of certain statements, concepts and truths worthwhile is the fact that these discourses influence what we believe is right or wrong, and as a consequence they influence our actions because it is human nature to act accordingly to what we hold to be ‘true’. Discourse and concepts thus matter by shaping the world we live in, and in line with this, shaping our actions.

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<sup>9</sup> Marianne Jorgensen, Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, (London: 2002), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Florian Schneider, ‘Video Introduction to Discourse Analysis’, *Politics EastAsia*  
<<http://www.politicseastasia.com/research/video-introduction-to-discourse-analysis/>> [accessed on 05-05-2017].

<sup>11</sup> Jorgensen, Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Florian Schneider, ‘Getting the Hang of Discourse Theory’  
<<http://www.politicseastasia.com/studying/getting-the-hang-of-discourse-theory/>> [accessed on 07-05-2017].

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

#### **1.4. Status quo: current (perception of) failed state framework**

When talking about discourse, one should keep in mind that different actors find themselves in different positions regarding these ‘regimes of truth.’ This influences the way they relate to it. For political leaders, so often called ‘the establishment’, it is much harder to undermine a certain regime of truth – since he or she is part of the apparatus preserving it. Scientists and scholars on the other hand are able to think, speak and write much freer – since questioning the ‘truth’ and looking beyond generally accepted knowledge is the essence of their work. A third actor well known for influencing discourse and regimes of truth is the media. They tend to stand somewhat in between the practical, political stance towards a regime of truth and the free thinking of scholars. Whilst they are often accused of being a lap dog of the establishment, they are still critical of the ‘truths’ told by the establishment and always provide reflection to them by questioning whether a certain regime of truth still holds true at a certain point in time.

The regime of truth upholding the failed states paradigm has changed intensely over time. Since its inception in the early 1990s, the concept has been created, embraced and now is slowly starting to get abandoned. Just like with any other regime of truth, here the different actors relate to it in a different way. Looking at the world of academics and scholars, one witnesses a clear call for moving away from the framework as used by the establishment in the aftermath of 9/11. Academics now state that the concept and the entire paradigm are conceptually flawed and extremely paternalistic.<sup>14</sup> This is made visible by the call to replace the term ‘failed state’ by other terms such as ‘troubled state,’ ‘rogue state’ and ‘fragile state’, or to refrain from using these labels entirely. By being able to broadcast this view to ‘the people’ through institutions like think tanks, academics and scholars are able to spread their knowledge. This knowledge reaches the same people who are subject to policy coming from the political establishment and strongly influences the way they look at it. Because the political establishment is subject to political opportunism – meaning one can logically assume that they create policy popular enough to get them re-elected - the ‘truth’ as told by academics and scholars influences the posture of the political establishment on a certain topic.

Looking at the political establishment of Western countries, they indeed seem to be very opportunistic when it comes to using the framework. Though the establishment acknowledges

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<sup>14</sup> These criticisms and the evolution of the concept and framework will be extensively discussed in the next chapter.



the motives behind calls for abandoning the framework, one can still sometimes find references to it. The reasons for this can be twofold. First, the framework - even though highly criticized - could still be used to fit ones' political agenda. If the benefits of using a framework outweigh the costs that come in the form of critique, one can safely assume that the rational political actor will still implement it. Second, it matters a great deal who the ruling government is. Sitting right-winged parties on the conservative side of the political spectrum are more prone to using a concept like 'failed states', since safeguarding security and prosperity is the core point of their essence. Left-winged parties are more likely to not merely focus their policy on the well-being of people at home, but on that of people abroad too. A government like this would be more prone to see the failure of states abroad in light of the need for developmental assistance, instead of seeing it in light of the need to protect the 'homeland' against threats coming from these failed states. There thus is a constant exchange of information between the political establishment and the world of academics and scholars, whereby policy created by the establishment provides academics with material for study, and the outcomes of these studies once again influence posture of the establishment and the way they will construct and frame new policy.

### **1.5. Research focus: turning point in history and the implications thereof**

It now is apparent that discourse regarding the failed state concept underwent major changes from its inception in the 1990's up until this date. The events on 9/11 caused the most vital turning point in the history of the concept, whereby definitely to the United States, attitude and policy towards failed states changed alongside the changing interpretation of the concept. From the United States one can logically expect this, since they were the ones under attack and had to set the record straight with those who meant them harm. However, from 2001, it seemed as if every state somehow allied to the United States went along in their harsh rhetoric towards failed states, most notably regarding Afghanistan and Iraq. Not the least because of President Bush's statement proclaiming 'either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists', as mentioned before. This basically cornered every state to think or act differently than the United States with regards to who needed to be seen as the enemy from that moment in time onwards. Though at the time this seemed like the right thing to do, criticism on the current interpretation of the failed state concept has been growing steadily over the past decade. How failed states discourse has evolved over time, and the consequences this brought along, is what this research is concerned with.

This thesis aims to perform a discourse analysis in line with founding father Foucault's logic, of the development of failed states discourse in foreign and military policy. Hereby, the focus lies on so-called hegemonic discourse. This is the dominant point of view within a society, usually kept in place by powerful social groups (mostly political).<sup>15</sup> This study thus tries to figure out how these powerful social groups changed their discourse and posture towards failed states. In light of the failed state framework and the major turning point of 9/11, the United States and allied Western states can definitely be viewed as the most important social groups of power that conserve and construct the 'reality' behind failed states. Because this research focusses on the ever-changing failed state discourse, it is a logical first step to focus on the actor that has been involved with failed states the most, namely: The United States. However, analyzing only the United States would prove too little of a challenge in order for this research to contribute to failed state literature. Reasoning would be too easy, since it is generally known that The United States indeed changed its attitude towards failed states after 9/11. Ultimately, they were the ones under attack and retaliated by invading Afghanistan, legitimizing their actions by arguing that it had failed to control its own territory.

This is why in this study a comparison will be made of the evolution of failed state discourse in the United States and the United Kingdom. The more practical reason behind comparing these two countries is the fact that traditionally, they tend to be very major contributors to international peacekeeping, peace-enforcement and peace-building missions. It is very likely to find plenty publicly accessible texts regarding failed states for analysis, since both countries are very invested in them. Not to forget, a foreign language can be a great barrier in discourse-analysis – a problem which will not occur when looking deeper in to American and British policy documents. The more structural reason behind comparing the U.S. and U.K. is twofold. First of all, to uncover what exact change was caused by the turning point in history on failed state political discourse of the U.S. and U.K. Second, by comparing these two countries, the assumption will be put to test that allied countries blindly followed the U.S. in its changed discourse.

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<sup>15</sup> Florian Schneider, 'Video Introduction to Discourse Analysis', *Politics EastAsia* <<http://www.politicseastasia.com/research/video-introduction-to-discourse-analysis/>> [accessed on 12-05-2017].

One might argue that it would have been impossible for the U.K. to do so because it holds a different place in the international system of states, bounded intensively by their membership to international partnerships such as the European Union and NATO. Or did their membership to NATO actually underwrite the assumption that U.S. discourse was adopted by the U.K., since Article 5 of the NATO Treaty states that an attack on one is an attack on all? This study tries to provide an overview of the evolution of failed states discourse and an answer to the question whether it is really true that American failed state discourse was adopted by the U.K. More so it will be examined whether the different political tradition of both countries affects the way they deal with crises like failed states, and if so, how they encompassed this in their security policy.

From both countries there obviously is an unlimited amount of text available on the topic of failed states. This is why a selection needs to be made beforehand to ensure the feasibility of conducting this research within the given amount of time. Since this study focusses on hegemonic discourse, the analysis will only incorporate political policy documents. Which documents have been selected will be further explained in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

## **1.6. Outline**

To form a solid base for analysis, the following chapter will describe the development of the failed state paradigm from its inception up until now. Without a decent understanding of the topic of interest, a good analysis can never be made. In this chapter, the origin, turning point and current perception of the ‘failed state’ concept will be outlined. Also, attention will be paid to the ever growing criticism on the concept (proving that discourse is ever changing and regimes of truth can be dismantled at any point in time). Following this theoretical disquisition, two chapters will be devoted to discuss the evolution and consequences of failed state discourse within U.S. and U.K. national security policy from the 1990s until present day. The time frame is set on this period since the early 1990s were the starting point of current state-failure thinking and it encompasses the events on 9/11 and the current growing criticism on the concept. In performing the above, this thesis ultimately hopes to provide the reader with a full understanding of the evolution of current failed state discourse in the U.S. and U.K., and to expose how this affected their attitude and policy towards failed states.

## 2. Failed state academic debate

### 2.1. Reversing roles: international stability or the sovereignty of states

When the term failed state entered politics and the academic world in the 1990s, political, military, and economic turmoil was bursting out in many relatively new proclaimed nation-states. The world witnessed - or was about to witness - raging civil wars in countries ranging from Somalia and Yugoslavia to Cambodia. Most of these states had been established during the vast proliferation of nation-states after World War II, mainly caused by the decolonization process.<sup>16</sup> The idea behind decolonization was that newly established states needed to be free from foreign influence and deserved the right to self-governance. This is why initially the international community was extremely hesitant to interfere with the growing domestic governmental breakdown and civic strife in those states. It was common belief that these relatively new states might be troubled, but they would hold their own by virtue of being independent.<sup>17</sup> However, this perception changed in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It became apparent that domestic political instability in these states led to massive abuses of human rights. Neighboring countries were taunted with refugee flows they were unable to handle and in some cases even the most basic human right – the right to live – was violated on a large scale.<sup>18</sup> The idea that it was ‘not done’ to interfere with domestic problems of sovereign states was soon abandoned.

Departure from this idea was embodied by the landmark United Nations document ‘an Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping’ (1992). This document was created by the United Nations during a period of so-called turbulence in the international system – referring to the rapid systemic changes that were occurring in relations among key states by the end of the Cold War.<sup>19</sup> The Agenda for Peace affirmed the renewed role that the international community awarded themselves, namely the one of humanitarian interventionists. Then Secretary General of the United Nations Boutros-Ghali described in the Agenda: ‘The time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty, however, has passed; its theory was never matched by reality. It is the task of leaders of states today to understand this and to find a balance between

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<sup>16</sup> Helman, Ratner, ‘Saving Failed States’, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy D. Sisk, ‘The Agenda for Peace Twenty Years On: Scholarly Perspectives on the United Nations and Intrastate Conflicts’, in: Achim Wennmann (red.), *20 Years of ‘An Agenda for Peace’: A New Vision for Conflict Prevention?* (Geneva, 2012), 8-15, here 8.

the needs of good internal governance and the requirements of an ever more interdependent world.<sup>20</sup> With this statement, one could say that Boutros-Ghali made it acceptable again for established, mostly Western states, to pass judgment on the performance of less ‘successful’ states. It was no longer a *faux pas* to label another sovereign state as failed, since it was to the importance of the entire international community that a state in need of ‘humanitarian assistance’ received help. Over the years, this help came in many different forms. Some failed states received financial aid, other states required medical aid in case of crises and others mostly needed help in restoring a certain level of security. Irrespective of the reason behind being labelled ‘failed’, at the time it meant not much more than being in need of a helping hand to restore domestic stability to the benefit of people yonder and the stability of the international system. As mentioned before, this all changed after the horrific events on 9/11.

## **2.2. Friend to foe: the inevitable consequence**

For most of the twentieth century, the world was divided by a great struggle over ideas: destructive totalitarian visions versus freedom and equality. America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones. We are menaced less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few.<sup>21</sup>

With this statement the Bush Administration started the first chapter of their 2002 National Security Strategy, confirming the profound change in posture towards failed states. Whereas the biggest threats of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could be found in clashing visions of class, nation and race between great powers, the biggest threat now lay in the domestic failure of nation-states. This vision was not exclusively awarded to the United States, as the international community quickly adopted the idea. Since then, weak and failing states were perceived as the single most important threat to the international order.<sup>22</sup> An idea that would last well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At the foundation of this argument laid the grown interdependency between countries. When failed states proved unable to project power and assert authority within their borders, they left their territories with power vacuums which easily degraded the society into a breeding ground

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<sup>20</sup> United Nations Security Council, *An Agenda for Peace, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping* (New York, 1992), paragraph 17.

<sup>21</sup> George W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, 2002), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 92.

for terrorism and instability.<sup>23</sup> By stressing the interdependency between countries, this legitimized the threat awarded to failed states that caused local unrest, since the unrest could easily spill over to other actors in the system. The international community needed to be able to rely on individual nation states to conquer chaos at home and to prevent the spread of any of it throughout the world.<sup>24</sup> Through 9/11 it became clear that failed states now were at the core of the problem. By facilitating or failing to counter potential threats to international security, failed states now became the main threat to international security and became a focal point in foreign policy documents all over the (Western) world.

Policymakers and academics became concerned with determining which states were failed or at risk of failure, to prevent them from becoming the ‘next Afghanistan.’ All possible indicators of state failure needed to be found, resulting in broad studies, indexes and works on the case of state failure. Risen political and criminal tensions, weak institutions, civil war and rising ethnic hostilities were among the indicators that could lead to a disintegration of a (somewhat) solid state into a failed one.<sup>25</sup> One of the clearest examples of the efforts made to determine which states had failed or not was the creation of the ‘Failed States Index’ by Foreign Policy magazine and the U.S. based Fund For Peace. Since 2005, this index ranks all sovereign states member to the United Nations for their vulnerability to state collapse. The last Failed State Index was produced in 2013, after which the index changed its name to ‘Fragile State Index.’ Though this may seem like a negligible change in tone of voice, it represents the last trend that needs to be addressed in this chapter devoted to the (academic) debate on the failed state concept.

### **2.3. Core point to critique: a concept at contest**

Though the analytical frame surrounding failed states had always received some criticism, within a decade after 9/11 this criticism grew substantially. At first, the harshened failed state discourse was not much contested because it accommodated the need to point out who were to blame for the havoc inflicted on the United States and the liberal way of life. Some scholars even argued that the shift in focus to failed states in foreign policy was unquestioningly accepted by states as the U.K., Canada, Australia and even the European Union.<sup>26</sup> Referring

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<sup>23</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, ‘Failed States in a World of Terror’, *Foreign Affairs* 81:4 (2002), 127-139, here 128.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 130.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, 132.

<sup>26</sup> Branwen Gruffydd Jones, ‘The global political economy of social crisis: Towards a critique of the ‘failed state’ ideology’, *Review of International Political Economy* 15:2 (2008), 18-205, here 181.

back to the theory behind discourse as explained in the introductory chapter, this is essential in understanding why it seemed as if the entire world went along with the ‘hostile failed states’ discourse. Western states tend to be major suppliers in determining what regimes of truth are valid at a certain point in time, since their governments belong to the ‘powerful social groups’ that influence discourse. As mentioned before - with few exceptions - the media mostly confirms what the political elite holds to be true and thereby serves as a hatch from politics to the people. By doing this they take away the incentive for ‘the people’ to question whether this particular framework should still persist. This is where the freedom in thinking and expression of scholars proves itself to be indispensable, as they constantly question certain truths by virtue of their profession.

While the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century progressed, many academics devoted their time to put together studies in which all forms of criticism on the failed-states paradigm were listed.<sup>27</sup> Since this chapter is meant merely to provide background information regarding the contestation of the failed-state paradigm, the different critiques will be briefly addressed here.

One can roughly identify six deficiencies to the concept, starting with the excessive aggregation of diverse states. Failed state theorists seem to have failed in finding a set of indicators for state failure that apply solely to failed states. Many failed state frameworks state that a failed state ideally ‘ticks’ all boxes of indicators, but reality has shown that it resides far from this ideal. Some scholars even claim that ‘there has never been a coherent set of factors that define failed states.’<sup>28</sup> Because of this flaw, intrinsically different states have come to fall under the same ‘failed state’ heading.

Resulting from this first conceptual flaw is the ‘cookie-cutter’ solutions that established states have implemented on failed states. In short, Western states believed that more order would solve all problems rooted in failed states.<sup>29</sup> This is embodied by the Fragile State Index of the Fund For Peace, as it suggests that ‘policymakers must focus on building the institutional capacity of weak states, particularly the ‘core five’ institutions: military, police, civil service,

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<sup>27</sup> For example, see: Charles T Call, ‘The Fallacy of the ‘Failed State’, *Third World Quarterly* 29:8 (2008), 1491-1507; Michael J. Mazarr, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Failed-State Paradigm’, *Foreign Affairs* 93:1 (2014), 113-121; Ilona Szuhai, ‘Rethinking the concept of failed state’, *Central European Papers* 3:2 (2015), 99-110.

<sup>28</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Failed-State Paradigm’, *Foreign Affairs* 93:1 (2014), 113-121, here 116.

<sup>29</sup> Call, ‘Fallacy of Failed State’, 1496.

the system of justice, and leadership.<sup>30</sup> Though strong institutions like these certainly play a big role in the successful functioning of a state, policy makers can and should not shut out the historical explanations why a state failed. Looking at a states history, one will find explanations to its failure specific to that individual country. This could provide insights which point to different flaws in society that spur failure, other than the lack of structure and order.<sup>31</sup>

A third criticism also refers back to the lack of focus on the case-specific demands when countering state failure. The classic response of Western states to the issues has been to strengthen state institutions. However, this ignores the ‘rules of governance’ belonging to this specific political entity in need.<sup>32</sup> For example, in many former colonized states the strength of institutions is subordinate to these institutions reflecting and responding to popular aspirations, needs and identity.<sup>33</sup> Here, strengthening institutions thus is not the remedy to their problems.

A fourth conceptual flaw lies in the marginalization of the role that having an **effective** peace plays in rebuilding a state at failure. State-building does not self-evidently lead to peace. It can even jeopardize it, when external players allocate resources to corrupt governments or to governments who only represent a minority.<sup>34</sup> History has shown that supporting corrupt groups to reach a certain goal can indeed backlash with tremendous consequences. Counterfactual reasoning makes one wonder if we would be talking about 9/11 and its consequences had the United States not supplied arms to an insurgent group, named the Taliban, to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan in the early 80’s.

The last two criticisms are more structural to the failed state explanatory frame as a whole. Western states are accused of paternalism and of denying the role they themselves played in current state failure. In perceiving current states at failure as a self-contained event, the West puts forth an ahistorical version of the truth. Though local elites and actors are certainly contributing to the failure of a state, it is impossible to ignore the role that Western states played in state failure by colonizing, exploiting and then leaving behind politically and ethnically divided states unable to perform as a political unity. To conclude, by implementing a concept

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<sup>30</sup> Fund For Peace, ‘What can be done to avert further weakening of states at risk and to stimulate recovery’, *Fragile States Index* <<http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/frequently-asked-questions/what-can-be-done-to-avert-further-weakening-of-states-at-risk-and-to-stimulate-recovery/>>

<sup>31</sup> Szuhai, ‘Rethinking Failed State’, 101.

<sup>32</sup> Call, ‘Fallacy of Failed State’, 1497.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 1498.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 1499.



as ‘failed state’, Western states presume that they know best what a successful state is.<sup>35</sup> The West can determine what is right and what is wrong for less powerful states – merely by virtue of their power position over states in the ‘Second’ and ‘Third’ World. As mentioned before, by labelling a state as failed, powerful Western states are able to use the failed state paradigm in a way that suits their own political agenda. This way, the role of the ‘Good Samaritan’ is traded off for one of self-convenience.<sup>36</sup>

15 years after failed states became the focal point of foreign policy, the calls to abandon the failed state paradigm seem to have outgrown support for it. It seems as though the concept was always contested, and the consequences of implementing it have proven catastrophically at times.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, 1499.

<sup>36</sup> Natasha Ezrow & Erica Frantz, ‘Revisiting the Concept of Failed State: bringing the state back in’, *Third World Quarterly* 34:8 (2013), 1323-1338, here 1324.

### **3. Research Method**

#### **3.1. Comparative Political Discourse Analysis**

Since this thesis aims to perform an analysis of hegemonic failed state discourse in the United States and the United Kingdom, the research frame is based on performing a Political Discourse Analysis. Though defining what political discourse entails might seem like an easy ordeal, in reality it can become an ambiguous project. The answer to this question lies in the definition one handles of politics itself. Narrowing down the definition, one comes to the simpler conclusion that political discourse is based on language coming from political authors only. This would include only ‘text and talks coming from political actors and institutions.’<sup>37</sup> A broader definition takes into account that there are many other actors and institutions influencing politics and political actors. Examples of these are think tanks, lobby groups, demonstrators and individual citizens. When taking their discourse (relating to political issues) into account, one would wield a broader definition of political discourse, defining it as ‘texts and talks by all participants in the political process.’<sup>38</sup> Given the limited time and room available for analysis, this thesis will focus on the narrow definition of political discourse. Hence, only text and talks authored by political institutions or political actors will be used in this analysis.

#### **3.2. Objects of Analysis**

To perform an analysis that is achievable in time, the texts available for analysis need to be narrowed down even further. Digging into all available political discourse on the failed state topic would produce too much text for analysis. Since the research question of this thesis is concerned with the development of failed discourse in foreign and military policy, attention was quickly drawn to the National Security Strategy of the United States. This document was first produced by Ronald Raegan in 1987, when he was confronted with dynamic change in the international system by the end of the 80s. Since then, every succeeding President has produced one or more National Security Strategy, in which they identify what threats are most eminent and how the U.S. should cope with them. Because the National Security Strategy is produced

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<sup>37</sup> Teun A. van Dijk, ‘What is Political Discourse Analysis?’, *Discourse in Society*

<<http://discourses.org/OldArticles/What%20is%20Political%20Discourse%20Analysis.pdf>> [accessed on 08-07-2017].

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

so frequently during the timeframe set in this analysis (1990 - present day), it is ideal to function as an object of analysis.

To perform a solid comparison with the strategy of the United Kingdom, ideally one would want the objects of analysis to be the same in both countries. However, the United Kingdom has not started to produce a unified ‘National Security Strategy’ until the year of 2008. Further study was necessary to find similar documents published by governmental institutions or political actors in the U.K. in the timeframe from 1990-2008. In doing so, it was attempted to find documents published around the same time as the American Security Strategies. When certain historical events happen, they can severely shape foreign policy and discourse. Therefore, it is essential to prevent comparing and analyzing two documents, whereby one document would already be influenced by a certain event and the other would not yet be. Eventually, after a thorough search through the available political text from both countries, the following documents were found, narrowing down the used texts for analysis to:

<b>United States</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>
National Security Strategy 1990	‘Options for Change’ framework 1990-1994
National Security Strategy 1993	Statements on the Defence Estimates 1995
National Security Strategy 1998	Strategic Defence Review 1998
National Security Strategy 2000	Delivering Security in a Changed World 2003
National Security Strategy 2002	National Security Strategy 2008
National Security Strategy 2006	National Security Strategy 2010
National Security Strategy 2010	National Security Strategy 2015
National Security Strategy 2015	

The comparison of failed states discourses between the U.S. and the U.K. covering the period of the early 1990s until present day will thus be based on statements found within these texts. How these statements are selected will be further elaborated in the following paragraph.

### **3.3. Analytical frame**

A nations National Security Strategy, or any document alike, is logically not merely concerned with the topic of this thesis: failed states. A final step in narrowing down the analysis is to

‘filter’ out only those statements that are related to the notion of state failure. In the preceding chapter it became apparent that the state failure concept is receiving substantial criticism for its conceptual ambiguity. This makes it almost impossible and highly undesirable to create a set of terms and words whereby the documents listed above can be ‘coded’. Besides this, taking into account the apparent changes which the failed states concept underwent since the early 1990s, it is very unlikely that all documents used in this analysis refer to failed states directly. This makes it fruitful to select discourse from the objects of analysis based on their reference to the broader framework surrounding failed states. A selection of statements within the selected texts will be made by using the following guidelines:

- **Reference to Failed States as such.** Logically, when texts refer directly to ‘failed states’ or ‘states at failure’ as such they supply this thesis with vital knowledge.
- **Reference to a changing international security system.** The ‘turbulence’ in the international system of nation states at the end of the 1980s can be seen as the source of a renewed paradigm on statehood and state success versus state failure. It would be impossible to analyze the development of a concept without taking into account its origin.
- **Reference to ‘new threats’ to international order and national security.** In line with the previous guideline, failed state thinking thrived during a time when the West started to re-examine their place in the international security system. The familiar East-West threats were slowly fading, causing concern on other threats to rise. Where Russia had been given top priority in foreign policy for decades, much of these resources could now be focused on other actors. This will provide a good understanding of how the focus came to be on state failure in the first place.
- **Reference to state-building, peacekeeping and peace-enforcement.** An important aspect of the failed state paradigm has been the ‘urge’ of the West to implement the ‘ideal’ way of life – a liberal democracy – in newly independent states or failing nation states. It was constantly stressed that no country could effectively build or restore a democracy without ensuring all aspects of a democracy (e.g. rule of law, free elections, respect for human rights) could thrive. The most influential means of the international

community to establish this is through state-building, peacekeeping and peace enforcement. This makes statements linked to these subjects essential to this thesis.

- **Reference to (promoting) democratic reform.** Again, in line with the previous guideline, all discourse on promoting and establishing democratic reform relates back to the essence of the failed state paradigm. When talking about the need for other countries to transform into democracies, one inevitably and automatically talks about preventing states to fail and becoming a threat to international security.
- **Reference to 9/11.** Since the events of 9/11 represent a major change in failed state perception and discourse, it is relevant to encompass statements on these events in the analysis. This contributes to the analysis by providing a decent understanding how both nation-states viewed 9/11 and how they linked this to their national security.

By means of the guidelines listed above, all mentioned policy documents will now be reviewed and all relevant statements will be bundled into a document which constitutes the analysis of this thesis. This comprehensive document can be consulted in the appendix of this thesis. The following chapter will present the analysis of failed state discourse in the United States, followed by a similar chapter devoted to the United Kingdom. A final chapter is devoted to draw conclusions and to formulate an adequate answer to the question central to this thesis.

## 4. Failed State Discourse in the United States

By now, it has become clear that the United States has been a catalyst in the evolution of failed state discourse. The events on 9/11 provided the United States with reasonable motives for re-evaluating their posture towards failed states and the place they held in the international system. We now examine exactly how the concept has evolved in their National Security Strategy from around the 1990s up until this date.

### 4.1. The ‘age of democratic peace’ versus the rise of ‘fragile democracies’

From the early 1990s, the National Security Strategy of the United States has continuously recognized the importance of an international system consisting of stable, preferably democratic states. With the collapse of the Soviet Union the classic threat of interstate conflict made way for intrastate turmoil. The importance of United Nations peacekeeping missions grew and these missions took on additional roles in resolving regional conflicts.<sup>39</sup> It was very clear at the time that regional conflicts could spill-over to neighboring countries and that they posed a risk to international stability. However, posture towards states experiencing internal strife was nowhere near hostile. On the contrary, in the 1990 National Security Strategy President Bush Sr. stressed the importance of so called ‘foreign assistance’.<sup>40</sup> By relating to these states as an aid, the United States confirmed its position as the ‘good Samaritan’.

With a drastically changed security environment in comparison to previous decades, it became clear that success ‘at home’ was more often determined by success abroad. Here, success still meant having stable, functioning democracies abroad that were able to uphold the rule of law. The latter was at risk in many countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of communism which caused ethnic and nationalist tensions to rise in many countries. The ‘Global Threat’ strategy that had served U.S. policy for decades made way for a focus on regional challenges and opportunities.<sup>41</sup> When reviewing the 1992 National Security Strategy, the importance assigned to nurturing strong democracies makes it look not much different than its predecessor.<sup>42</sup> However, this is the first time the term ‘fragile’ is named in the policy documents. Though here it relates to the newly established democracies in Central and

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<sup>39</sup> George H.W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, 1990), 18.

<sup>40</sup> Bush, *National Security Strategy 1990*, 18.

<sup>41</sup> George H.W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, 1993), 13.

<sup>42</sup> Bush, *National Security Strategy 1993*, 4.

Eastern Europe, it provides a starting point from where the U.S. begins to pass judgment on the ‘state’ of another nation-states stability.

#### **4.2. A failed state security threat, a nurtured democracy solution**

When Bill Clinton was sworn into office in 1993 he succeeded more than a decade of Republican rule. Though some might have expected a big change, Clintons legacy was founded on principles found on the right side of the Democratic spectrum. Known for his relatively tough stance as a Democrat on migration and security, the tone of voice in Clintons National Security Strategy from 1998 does not differ much from the previous two Security Strategies. However, Clinton seems clearer in describing American interests at heart and security threats to these interests. The final of these security threats being ‘failed states,’ creating an unprecedented situation whereby failed states were seen as a security risk to American interest.

The policy document states: ‘As governments lose their ability to provide for the welfare of their citizens, mass migration, civil unrest, famine, mass killings, environmental disasters and aggression against neighboring states or ethnic groups can threaten U.S. interests and citizens.’<sup>43</sup> Though definitely indicated as a threat, it was seen as an indirect one. The U.S. Administration then argued that the chaos and unrest resulting from state failure regionally could ‘spill over’ and thereby harm U.S. interests. There was no such thing as self-defense against failed states. More so, the failing of a state needed to be prevented in order to avoid having to rebuild them after an internal crisis.<sup>44</sup> To do this, strengthening and promoting democratic values and institutions once more provided the solution to the problem. Promoting strong democracies worldwide even acquired the status of ‘Third Core Objective’ in the Security Strategy, intended to promote an international system of states consisting of stable democracies.<sup>45</sup>

This did not change in the National Security Strategy of 2000. President Clinton opened by quoting President Roosevelt’s final inaugural address, stating that: ‘We have learned that our own well being is dependent on the well being of other nations far away. We have learned to be citizens of the world, members of the human community.’<sup>46</sup> In a globalized world, this once

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<sup>43</sup> Bill Clinton, *A National Security Strategy For a New Century*, (Washington, 1998), 7.

<sup>44</sup> Clinton, *National Security Strategy 1998*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, 33.

<sup>46</sup> Bill Clinton, *A National Security Strategy For a New Century* (Washington, 2000), i.

more stressed the influence that events abroad had on security and stability at home. The grown understanding of the implications caused by the interrelatedness between countries logically coincided with a growing interest for events and opportunities abroad. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the U.S. was flourishing and experienced the longest sustained expansion of its economy in history.<sup>47</sup> By doing so well at home, the U.S. could increasingly afford to shift its focus from domestic to foreign affairs. This also holds true with regards to failed states, who at the time were still listed as one out of four security threats to U.S. interests.

As the Security Strategy progresses and discusses the topic, it becomes clear that the humanitarian, selfless motivation behind interference with troubled states was slowly getting accompanied by a growing self-interest. By assisting states at failure to reestablish stability - preferably in a democratic polity - the U.S. enabled itself to project their power by spreading their values and way of life. This way, besides providing much needed aid to people and states in need, helping failed states also served the purpose of reinforcing their power position by legitimizing their role as ‘leader by example’ and by preventing a possible threat to their power position to rise in an unstable region. As President Clinton described: ‘The United States remains the world’s most powerful force for peace, prosperity and the universal values of democracy and freedom. Our nation’s central challenge – and our responsibility – is to sustain that role by seizing the opportunities of this new global era for the benefit of our own people and people around the world.’<sup>48</sup> Thus, even though failed states were still marked as a security threat in the 2000 Security Strategy, they provided the U.S. with opportunity as well.

#### **4.3. The 2002 National Security Strategy**

Within 24 hours after the attacks on 9/11, President Bush had made it very clear that someone was going to pay for the trauma inflicted on the United States. When the 2002 National Security Strategy was published, it became clear that the document would be a major turning point in U.S. failed state discourse. All the promises President Bush made to the American people on that fateful day in 2001 were captured in the Security Strategy which his Administration published a year later.

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<sup>47</sup> Focus Economics, ‘U.S. Economic Outlook’ <<http://www.focus-economics.com/countries/united-states>> [accessed on 20-07-2017].

<sup>48</sup> Clinton, *National Security Strategy 2000*, i.



The Strategy begins by acknowledging a changed type of threat to the U.S. For many centuries, the largest threat to a state was formed by another state trying to conquer. This also held true for the U.S., who found itself in an ideological conflict for many decades with the Soviet Union. After 9/11, President Bush declared that ‘America was now threatened less by conquering states than by failing ones.’<sup>49</sup> By doing so, failed states were placed at the top of all political agenda’s concerned with security, intelligence and foreign relations.

The idea of failed states being the countries biggest threat was legitimized by their incapability to maintain order in their homeland, enabling insurgents and terrorists to base themselves on their territory from where they could plan and prepare attacks on their alleged ‘enemies’. By framing failed states into this picture, being one equaled being a direct threat to the survival of the U.S. In interacting with failed states, the U.S. now acted out of self-defense instead of being a selfless aid.

Throughout the entire document, attitude and discourse regarding failed states has a very paternalistic character. The Bush Administration based its entire National Security Strategy on the protection of ‘nonnegotiable demands of human dignity’.<sup>50</sup> By framing these demands as nonnegotiable, the U.S. determined what would be the ‘regime of truth’ from that point in time. Namely, that each and every state should uphold certain demands in order not to be seen as an enemy. States that proved unable to abide to these demands, even though they might have functioned well in the international system without ‘bothering’ other states, were still considered failed and a foe. By encompassing this idea in their National Security Strategy, one could say that the U.S. placed itself in a superior position over other countries, determining what is right and what is wrong.

Since the National Security Strategy of 2002 was published, for the U.S. failed states equaled the countries most notable enemy, to be dealt with through a policy of forward presence in instable regions, promoting democratic principles through the ‘War of Ideas’ and ending autocratic rule by intervention.

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<sup>49</sup> Bush, *National Security Strategy 2002*, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, 4.

#### **4.4. Halfway through the 00's, rhetoric changes**

By the year of 2006, President Bush was serving his second term in office when his Administration published a new National Security Strategy. In the years that passed since the 2002 National Security Strategy was published, President Bush had booked many successes in his fight against terrorism and in line with this - failed states. As a result of the U.S. intervention, the Afghan state was freed from the Taliban rule and was able to replace it with a freely-elected government. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein was removed from office after a rule of well over 20 years and in countries like Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, small steps were taken towards establishing a more democratic country.<sup>51</sup>

Having achieved great success did not tempt the U.S. to take a few steps back. On the contrary, throughout the 2006 National Security Strategy - and more than ever before - the focus is put on how to establish, reinforce and nurture democracies in order to preserve international stability and security. It is striking to see that the use of terminology with regards to failed states has changed completely. President Bush only refers to 'failed states' as such once when talking about the potential of countries on the African continent. When discussing states previously labelled as 'failed', different terms now got assigned to them.

These terms ranged from 'rogue states' to 'states with fragile stages of political development' and 'tyrannies'. The latter provides an interesting insight of how the framework regarding failed states changed. Where the term failed state refers to all components of this entity failing, the Security Strategy of 2006 started speaking of 'tyrannies'.<sup>52</sup> Though this looks like an insignificant change, it provides a significantly more detailed description of who is to blame or to be targeted when a state fails. By simply calling an entire state failed, one legitimizes action taken against all components of this state. By no longer labelling failed states as such but rather as tyrannies, the U.S. drew a clearer line in who needed to be dealt with should intervention in a state at failure be necessary. From this, one could conclude that President Bush used this new rhetoric to posture the U.S. in a more moderate, less hostile relationship towards failed states. It was no longer a war against an entire country or even a war against an 'ideology'. Instead and resembling the failed state framework from the early 1990s, focus once again shifted to the

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<sup>51</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, 2006), 2.

<sup>52</sup> Bush, *National Security Strategy 2006*, 3.

catalyst behind states failing – namely totalitarian, autocratic and unfit governments.

#### **4.5. Obama’s legacy: changed perception and softened tone of voice**

In 2009 President Barack Obama was sworn into office as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. At the start of his career as President he was most commonly remembered by virtue of being the first President in American history of African-American descent. After serving two terms in Office, he is now remembered for many other reasons. With regards to failed state discourse, his legacy can be found in a complete break with the failed state framework that influenced policy in his preceding Administrations.

The break with the ‘old’ framework is visible through the change in perception of how the success of the U.S. relates to the success of failed or failing states. Where previous Administrations reasoned that success abroad equaled success at home, President Obama completely turned this argument around. He noted that strength abroad begins with the steps the U.S. takes at home.<sup>53</sup> According to Obama, the U.S. would not be able to lead the international system of states right when facing domestic difficulties. By doing so, Obama provided the country with a realistic reflection on the countries own behavior as well, moving away from the paternalistic argumentation of ‘knowing what is best’ without questioning ones’ own behavior. He suggested that the U.S. should lead and achieve its goals by living their own values at home and setting the right example.<sup>54</sup> To President Obama, this went hand in hand with not trying to impose their own values on others through force. This created a complete departure from the ‘War of Ideas’, as pursued by President George W. Bush in the aftermath of 9/11.

Furthermore, the 2010 National Security Strategy stressed the importance of renewing American leadership in order to advance their own interests.<sup>55</sup> The entire document seems to be serving as a mirror for the U.S., exposing where and how the U.S. can make changes within its own borders in order to contribute to a safer world. However, the document starts referring to failed states as such again. Where the 2006 National Security Strategy only used the term discussing African states, President Obama once more applies it to all states incapable of

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<sup>53</sup> Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, 2010), introduction.

<sup>54</sup> Obama, *National Security Strategy*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, 2.

functioning in the international system on its own and thereby endangering regional and global security.<sup>56</sup>

Even though failed states thus were still considered capable of endangering international security, as of the 2010 National Security Strategy the U.S. took steps back with regards to failed states and changed its posture from forward presence and power projection into expressing an open-ended wish for other states to abide to the rules and principles of democracy, human rights and good governance.

This renewed posture was further elaborated in the latest published National Security Strategy dating from 2015. Here, references to failed states can only be found in the form of ‘fragile and conflicted states’, creating a departure from the use of the term ‘failed’ in the policy document and hereby (most likely) admitting to the growing criticism on the concept of ‘failed’ states.<sup>57</sup> Where the threat coming from failed states dominated U.S. National Security Strategies for almost a decade, in 2015 it became clear that this threat had made place for the resurrection of an old one. President Obama notes in the document that power among great states is starting to get more dynamic again, requiring the U.S. to reconsider its posture and influence over international affairs.<sup>58</sup> Judging by the size and influence of these great powers like Russia, China and India – they now indeed pose far greater threats to U.S. interests around the globe than failed states do, should the U.S. refuse to adapt to their growing power.

To conclude, the framework that supported failed state thinking in the U.S. has undergone many changes during the past two decades. Sometimes these changes were logically explained by events such as 9/11, other times they were more so influenced by the human tendency to self-interest. Regardless of the reasons for change in the framework, we now know this change has had a major influence on posture and policy towards failed states.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, 8.

<sup>57</sup> Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, 2015), 1-2.

<sup>58</sup> Obama, *National Security Strategy 2015*, 4.

## 5. Failed State Discourse in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has a relatively new tradition of publishing a coherent national security strategy. It took until 2008 before such a document was produced. By that time, the U.K. government realized that it had to change its understanding of national security because of the emergence of new and different types of threats.<sup>59</sup> Where the traditional idea of national security was mostly based on protecting British territory and the survival of the state, they now understood that national security went hand in hand with other challenges like transnational crime, pandemics and environmental issues. Therefore, since 2008 an all encompassing National Security Strategy has been produced.<sup>60</sup>

A discussion of the failed states framework as mentioned in strategic national security documents of the United Kingdom will be provided in this chapter.

### 5.1. Change of thought at the dawn of a new era

By the early 1990s the U.K. was well aware of the rapidly changing global security environment. The Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall had fallen, resulting in a rapid expansion of globalisation. Even though the British government was able to point out the exact changes going on in the international (security) system, for most part of the 1990s they seemed to be experiencing great difficulty to adjust to this new era.<sup>61</sup> This is visible through the lack of providing for a coherent security strategy, just in a time when the country needed it the most. Because of fading traditional threats and emerging new ones, U.K. governmental institutions needed new guidelines upon which to base their policies towards these new threats.

Instead of providing the country with a new, concrete strategy, the Conservative Government led by Prime Minister John Major came up with the 'Options for Change' framework. As the name suggests it was not much more than a framework, subject to frequent changes over time, aimed at describing the ways in which the Armed Forces of the U.K. should be altered to meet the challenges of the new era.<sup>62</sup> This meant a major over-focus on the practical side of meeting

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<sup>59</sup> Cabinet Office, *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom, Security in an interdependent world* (London, 2008), 3.

<sup>60</sup> Cabinet Office, *National Security Strategy*, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Markus Mäder, *In Pursuit of Conceptual Excellence* (Bern, 2003), 48.

<sup>62</sup> Mäder, *Pursuit of Conceptual Excellence*, 49-51.

new challenges and a complete lack of focus on posture and attitude towards them. The loosely defined 'framework' was based on three Defence Roles. The most important two logically being the defence against direct threats to the homeland and Britain's Dependent Territories. The lowest priority was attributed to Defence Role 3, standing for Britain's participation in all remaining missions, mostly U.N. peacekeeping missions.<sup>63</sup> At the time, U.N. peacekeeping missions often took place in states unable to maintain order and provide stability and security in the homeland, or to say: 'failed states.' Judging by the U.K. assigning the lowest priority to these missions, it shows that the country was much less concerned with the failure of other states than with the protection of its own territory. Looking at the territorial disputes the U.K. has experienced in recent history, this is a sensible train of thought.

In 1995, a more concrete strategy was provided through the 'Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995'. Though still mostly concerned with the practical implications of the new security environment on the size and functioning of the Armed Forces, the document also gave a brief description of the general security and defence policy of the U.K. Here, the relationship between British interests and stability elsewhere in the world is noted.<sup>64</sup> To protect British interests, the U.K. would use its influence 'to promote standards of democracy, liberal capitalism and the rule of law, in the belief that their wider spread will not only be to our benefit, including our greater security, but also to the benefit of the international community as a whole.'<sup>65</sup> This shows that the U.K. understood well the importance to its own security of having a system of stable, functioning states abiding to some of the most basic democratic principles. Furthermore, the Statement recognized that the diminished risk of global war did not equal a complete disappearance of security threats to the U.K. Instead, the traditional threat had been replaced with a more diffuse one, apparent through an increasing number of small-scale conflicts triggered by regional instability which easily spilled over to neighbouring states through which they created a chain reaction of instability.<sup>66</sup> While the Statement does not refer to failed states as such or as a direct security threat, it does mention the impact conflicted regions or states can have on international security and British interests.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, 52.

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm Rifkind, *Statements on the Defence Estimates 1995, Stable Forces in a Strong Britain* (London, 1995), 9.

<sup>65</sup> Rifkind, *Statements Defence Estimates*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, 23.

## 5.2. The 1998 Strategic Defence Review and onwards: a first step towards a National Security Strategy

The first real effort to translate the ongoing changes in the security environment into a coherent strategy was made in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review, published by the Labour Government led by Prime Minister Tony Blair. His Secretary of State for Defence, George Robertson, summed up what new challenges exactly the U.K. was facing with regards to its national security and how these challenges needed to be tackled.

The Review opens by observing a ‘complex mixture of uncertainty and instability’ in a radically changed world.<sup>67</sup> In doing so, it does not differ much from previous defence- and security policy documents. However, the 1998 Review was a first in mentioning the security risk coming from ‘dangerous regimes in the world.’<sup>68</sup> Cases like the 1990 Iraq invasion in Kuwait had shown what rogue government were capable of and how their actions could seriously threaten (regional) stability. By recognizing the interconnectedness between the interests of the U.K. and the international community of states, the notion that troubled states needed attention was starting to get accepted and prioritized. The Review even went as far to state that the national security and prosperity of the U.K. was dependent on promoting international stability, freedom and economic development.<sup>69</sup> For a state that up until then had viewed its own national security in the light of a direct threat or attack to its own territory, this was a ground-breaking change of thought.

During Tony Blair’s second term as Prime Minister of the U.K., the understanding that events abroad were of growing importance to interests ‘at home’ was further elaborated in the 2003 Defence White Paper ‘Delivering Security in a Changed World.’ This is the first time a British strategic policy document listed ‘failed or failing states’ as a risk to the wider security of the U.K.<sup>70</sup> This was not coincidental, since only two years had passed since the attacks of 9/11 had taken place in the United States. Even though they were not targeted directly at the U.K., the U.K. interpreted them to be a direct attack for two reasons. First of all, the attacks were targeted at the ‘Western’ way of life. By being long-time allies with the U.S. and sharing the same free and democratic values, the U.K. immediately aligned with the U.S. after the attacks. Second,

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<sup>67</sup> George Robertson, *Strategic Defence Review* (London, 1998), 1.2.

<sup>68</sup> Robertson, *Strategic Defence Review*, 1.8.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, 2.21.

<sup>70</sup> Geoff Hoon, *Delivering Security in a Changed World, Defence White Paper* (London, 2003), 1.

by virtue of its membership to NATO and NATO's clause that 'an attack on one, is an attack on all', the U.K. automatically viewed the attacks on the U.S. as an attack on itself. By the time the 2003 Defence White Paper was published, the U.S. had already pointed out failed states as a harbour for terrorism and as the most vital threat to international security. The leading position of the U.S. as a global superpower and the interconnectedness between both countries made it a small step for the U.K. to do the same in its policy.

It is striking to see how much resemblance one can find between the legitimization of the U.S. and the U.K. of why failed states needed to be seen as one of the largest threats to national security. Just like the U.S. did in its 2002 National Security Strategy, the U.K. points out that failed states 'can contain areas of ungoverned territory which provide potential havens and sources of support for terrorist groups and criminal networks involved in drugs production or the plundering of natural resources.'<sup>71</sup> This way, posture towards failed states suddenly became one of the largest focal points in British security strategy.

### **5.3. A National Security Strategy for the United Kingdom**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the first coherent National Security Strategy for the U.K. was published in 2008 by the Cabinet of Prime Minister Gordon Brown. He recognized that the scope and approach of this new, specific strategy document came forth out of a changed understanding in what way the national security of the U.K. had changed.<sup>72</sup> It was no longer enough to base the strategy of protecting national security on a loose set of policy documents and White Papers. The U.K. needed a strategic document appointing all current security threats and the appropriate responses to counter them. In doing so, the Cabinet Office tried to deliver the latest step in what they called 'a series of reforms bringing greater focus and integration to our approach.'<sup>73</sup> This is what the 2008 'National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom' provided.

Early on, the Security Strategy acknowledges that it is of no use to create a distinction between domestic and foreign policy.<sup>74</sup> Domestic and foreign interests are infrangibly linked to each

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<sup>71</sup> Hoon, *Security in Changed World*, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Cabinet Office, *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom, Security in an interdependent World* (London, 2008), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Cabinet Office, *National Security Strategy 2008*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, 8.



other and both need to be taken into account when trying to benefit the U.K.'s interest at home and abroad.

When discussing the topic of this thesis, the 2008 National Security Strategy refers to them as 'failed and fragile states.'<sup>75</sup> In this sense, not much has changed since the 1998 Strategic Defence Review. However, when comparing the references to these failed and fragile states in both policy documents, it immediately becomes clear that one is looking at two completely different documents by virtue of their essence. Where the term was briefly mentioned in the 1998 Review, the 2008 Strategy provides for a complete discussion of the exact threat coming from them and the way this threat should be countered. Here it states: 'Currently, most of the major threats and risks emanate from failed or fragile states', indicating that the failure of a state indeed posed the largest threat to U.K. interest.<sup>76</sup> Reasoning behind this threat perception was that the inability of failed states led to a destabilization of an entire region, spilling chaos over until the point where it directly affected U.K. interest. As a solution, the U.K. Strategy indicated that accountable, democratic governments capable of operating within the boundaries of the rule of law needed to be nurtured.<sup>77</sup> Here we see great resemblance with the Security Strategies of the U.S.

#### **5.4. The latest change**

In the 2010 National Security Strategy, the threat perception regarding failed states was turned around once more as it redefined failed states as a direct threat to British interests again. Just like we witnessed in the aftermath of 9/11, it was stressed that failed states provided terrorists with ill-governed or ungoverned space which they could exploit to benefit their own cause.<sup>78</sup> The existence of failed states enabled terrorists to go overseas and to gain experience in their practices, after which they could return to the U.K. with all relevant know-how to conduct an attack.<sup>79</sup> Looking at the relative increase in terrorist attacks on British soil since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this is very understandable reasoning.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, 19.

<sup>78</sup> Cabinet Office, *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy* (London, 2010), 28.

<sup>79</sup> Cabinet Office, *Strong Britain in Age of Uncertainty*, 28.

Though the U.K. still notes a threat coming from failed states, on the other hand one can see the volume of text dedicated to describing the failed state threat diminishing in the last two Security Strategies. This also holds true for the 2015 National Security Strategy. When discussing the topic here, the Cabinet of Prime Minister David Cameron starts putting most emphasis on all the different ways through which the U.K. can prevent (regional) conflicts from escalating, instead of emphasizing what will happen when a regional conflict results in state failure. Of course, helping failed states in time to prevent state failure is mostly driven by self-interest. Regional instability touches U.K. interests in many ways. However, a resurrection of the role of ‘aid’ towards failed states is also visible. This becomes apparent through the fact that in 2015, the U.K. reserved 50% of the budget of the Department for International Development for assistance to failed states.<sup>80</sup> This way, in their own words, the U.K. would be able to: ‘deliver more effectively for the world’s poorest and for the UK national interest.’<sup>81</sup> So even though the policy document still refers to these states as ‘failed’, helping them prevent from failing now regained its importance.

Just as apparent as in all analyzed U.S. National Security Strategies, U.K. security strategy documents have strongly contributed to influencing the ‘regimes of truth’ that helped shape the failed state framework in the U.K. To conclude, it is now time to use all gathered information from this and the previous chapter in order to formulate answers to the questions central to this thesis in the following and final chapter.

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<sup>80</sup> Cabinet Office, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015, A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom* (London, 2015), 48.

<sup>81</sup> Cabinet Office, *National Security Strategy 2015*, 48.

## 6. Conclusion

After reading, analyzing and interpreting a great number of security strategies and documents of both the United States and the United Kingdom, it now is time to put all the information found through this research together to answer the question of how exactly failed state discourse has evolved in both countries, and to figure out whether there are striking resemblances between their discourses which could indicate both countries have affected each others 'regimes of truth.'

To start off, both countries repeatedly stress their strong alliance when it comes to defending each others interests and the interests of the international community. Though bounded by a strong mutual relationship, there are many differences between both countries that have a great impact on the way they look at security issues. One of these differences being the diverse traditional threats they faced. Where the territory of the United States has not been contested for a long time, the United Kingdom has fought wars to defeat a conquering state off its own territory or that of its Dependent Territories in very recent history. Where the United States was facing the Soviet Union for decades in an ideological struggle during the Cold War, the United Kingdom has not experienced such a direct clash with another state over contesting ideas. When a state is used to experiencing a certain type of threat for a long period of time, it might start using its previously gained experience as a starting point when facing a new threat. Judging the overall development of the threat perception coming from failed states of both countries, this seems to be true for both the United States and United Kingdom.

The United States identifies failed states as a security threat to American interest roughly ten years before the United Kingdom does so. This is most likely explained by the fact that the United States was very well aware of the possible conflicts resulting from a clash with a state that upholds a conflicting ideology to ones own. Though failed or failing states by the early 1990s actually caused regional suffering and spill-overs to neighboring countries, in most cases failed states were also the ones who did not uphold the same democratic values as the United States. Hence, the over-presence of references in the National Security Strategies of the United States on the importance of 'nurturing democracies' for countering state failure. Undoubtedly, the United States would have been strongly convinced that democracy was the solution to the problem of state failure and that it could prevent local suffering by providing a failing state with a functioning, law abiding political polity. However, framing the failed states paradigm like

this also served their own interest. By bringing forth ‘democracy’ as the magical solution to the world’s suffering and instability, it confirmed its own power position acquired just by virtue of living these democratic principles and being the ‘prime leader of example.’

For the United Kingdom on the contrary, the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by a complete lack of outward focus. Being much closer to the European continent than the United States, the security policies of the United Kingdom were blurred for quite some years after the fall of the Soviet Union by the urge to create policy directed at protecting ‘the homeland’ only. Because both countries lived a different history, the differences in their early posture towards failed states are fully understandable.

These differences seem to narrow down after the ‘turning point in history’ that has been central to this thesis. The first British strategic security document that is produced after the attacks in America on 9/11 took place immediately labels failed states as the largest threat to national and international security. In doing so, the United Kingdom indeed seems to adopt discourse used by the United States in their National Security Strategy dating from 2002, through determining that the threat coming from failed states is to be found in the opportunities they provide terrorists with for settling, planning, and carrying out terrorist attacks on the territory of these failed states. Here, it is difficult for anyone analyzing the security strategies of both countries published in the aftermath of the attacks not to notice the resemblance between them. This also constitutes one of the criticisms on the entire failed state paradigm, stating that other powerful countries blindly followed the discourse used by the United States simply because of their power position in today’s world.

As the years progress however, differences between failed state discourse in the United States and the United Kingdom start to occur once more. It seems as if to the United States, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 sparked an intense, emotional but temporary response to failed states in order to make sense of the harm inflicted on the country through the attacks. By putting the blame of this national trauma on failed states, the United States found someone to retaliate on. As soon as the United States had ‘retaliated’ on all states that they had assigned part of the blame of 9/11 to, one witnesses an almost immediate softening of discourse towards failed states. In this, it also plays a big role that the Bush Administration responsible for all policies created in the aftermath of the attacks was succeeded by eight years of Democratic rule. Barack Obama is

well known for his open posture towards former adversaries and his willingness to engage in dialogue with them to overcome previous grievances.

Looking at the United Kingdom, one could say that the events on 9/11 made them realize just how serious suffering resulting from failed states could be. Though the United Kingdom had previously recognized the existence of unstable regimes and the suffering they caused locally, they failed to recognize the link that their own national security had to regions elsewhere in the world. As 9/11 made them well aware of this fact, it is striking to see that contrary to the United States, the United Kingdom seems to be sticking to the failed state framework as it was used in the aftermath of 9/11 much longer. This is most likely explained by the fact that it was only after 2001 that the United Kingdom itself started to experience terrorist attacks on its own territory, committed by the very same terrorist groups that settled and thrived in failed or failing states at the beginning of the century to prepare the attacks on the United States. Even though the 9/11 framework is indeed kept in place for a longer period by the United Kingdom, they too start to ‘tone down’ the rhetoric they use and have even started to re-emphasize the importance of providing aid to failed states. This obviously serves benefit of the United Kingdom, but also the well-being of the people yonder plays an important role in this line of thought.

To sum up, one can only confirm that there have been and still are defects to the failed state paradigm. Indeed, the term failed state has been too loosely defined which caused it to be applied to too many countries. Indeed, the term failed state has been encompassed in the national security strategies of both the United States and the United Kingdom to suit ones own political agenda. Indeed, by labelling a country as failed one seems to be holding the absolute truth in its own hand on what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong.’ And to conclude, indeed, the failed state paradigm put in place by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is outdated and does not suit the modern world anymore.

However, after reading into many works describing the criticisms on the entire failed states paradigm and after reading into the actual threat coming from states that are unable to secure stability in their homeland, I reject the call of many scholars to completely abandon the use of alternative terms to state failure, such as: fragile states, rogue states and troubled states. Indeed, once again, these terms pass a judgment on the performance of another state, which could be interpreted as paternalism. Despite this, I do believe that no matter how sensitive the subject may be; it should never get in the way of defining a problem by its righteous name. Especially

when it comes to national security, states should remain able to describe and point out security threats as perceived by themselves.

Hopes are that this master's thesis has contributed to the existing field of literature on failed states discourse by virtue of providing an overview of the development of the failed state framework in the United States and the United Kingdom and by drawing a comparison between the way they used the failed state framework in their strategic national security policy.

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