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State Collapse and Domestic Devolution – Wicked Hybrid Conflicts

I. William Zartman

This case study presents the tumultuous history of four States (namely the Central African Republic, Libya, Yemen, and Afghanistan) which, despite clear differences, exhibit similar traits: a power vacuum created by the inefficiency of the State leads to power struggles among local figures, fueled by corruption, looting of natural resources, interethnic or intertribal fights, all the above being aroused by kinetic or non-kinetic actions by foreign actors.

The case study demonstrates what happens when the State level is removed as a society governance mechanism. It casts a grim picture of what could happen if hybrid warfare techniques lead to the undermining of a whole State.

The case is not a structured demonstration of coordinated hybrid warfare actions. Rather, it lists a series of events that may have been fueled by hybrid warfare techniques (corruption, disinformation or misinformation, cyber activities, etc.). It serves as a reflection on what happens when the State level of governance is removed, and how chaos may be created and perpetuated by internal and external forces.

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This case may be complemented by reading Corpora, Christopher (2023), How to undermine a Nation-State in 120 days: mediation and negotiation in a hybrid warfare world, Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution, 24-3, 503 (available here: https://www.cardozo-jcr.com/volume-243-symposium-2022).

STATE COLLAPSE AND DOMESTIC DEVOLUTION – WICKED HYBRID CONFLICTS

I. William Zartman

Introduction

We may think of politics – and economics and society as well, *pace* Weber – in an international context as operating at four levels: local, national, regional, and international. "All politics is local", it has been said: the State is the national level, the region several small and weak States sharing some sort of co-identification, and the international community has dominant and smaller members.

However, when the State is unable to perform its functions of security, justice, and welfare, these tend to fall to the lowest level of socio-political organization, the local community, which in many societies is the tribal level (in more developed societies, it can be the small town or neighborhood, as in the Old Wild West). That is a catastrophic development: on the one hand because the tribe cannot handle political interaction at the higher level, and on the other hand, for that reason, the situation produces a national power vacuum that sucks in the upper two levels – to promote their own local interests and to prevent others from doing the same.

This produces a *wicked situation* – "*pervasive, complex, and ill-structured problems*" (Lira 2010) that *"contain an interconnected web of sub-problems; every proposed solution to part or the whole of the wicked problem will affect other problems in the web"* (Docherty & Lira 2013). And because it occurs in the contemporary era, it involves *hybrid warfare* (also known as Gray Zone Conflict – Hicks & Friends 2019): *"coercion below the level of direct warfare [that] includes information operations, political coercion, economic coercion, cyber operations, proxy support, and provocation by State-controlled Forces."*[1] These definitions deserve a special note, for they generally are used for the conduct of top-level international conflicts, with the lower levels getting only the drippings; here, they are used for lowest level conflicts whose context in a political vacuum draws in the upper levels, a reversal of the usual process. The situation then is open to fishing by external forces who enter sovereign territory, either by invitation from the weak Government floating on the top of the vacuum, or without it, and providing arms to the lower-level fragments, often to complement local traditional weapons and methods. Finally, the vacuum impinges

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[1] Center for Strategic and International Studies (https://www.csis.org/programs/gray-zone-project)

on individuals, who then are impelled to seek meaning and order in extremist religious movements.

The purpose of this case study is to provide a basis for understanding what happens when the State – the overarching unit of national life throughout the world, and the components of international order – implodes and disappears. Without getting lost in the nature(s) of the State where it exists, this case study will look at examples where it has collapsed and where hybrid warfare replaces State order as a predominant dynamic of domestic relations.

The four States considered – the Central African Republic, Libya, Yemen, and Afghanistan – are similar in their basic assignment to this category, although they differ in the idiosyncratic details, a concise summary of which follows.

The Central African Republic[2]

The Central African Republic (CAR) had never been a State before French colonial implantation in 1906 and was given independence with a State-like suit of clothes in 1960 but with nobody inside. The suit fit its second president after its first coup, after six years of independence, who declared himself Emperor a decade later; Emperor Bokassa and his Empire were removed in 1979 by a coup supported by the former colonial power. Even though it had only three presidents and one party and despite its independence in 1960, CAR remained in neo-colonial dependency with French military, economic, and administrative control. In the African Spring of the early 1990s, little noticed forerunner of the Arab Spring two decades later, CAR produced a leadership change in a free and fair multiparty election in August 1993, but it was then overthrown in a military coup. The French dominance began to weaken, and UN Development Program (UNDP) actions, the UN Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUCRA) and a peacekeeping force from the Central African Monetary and Economic Community (CEMAC) were established. After less than a decade, in 1999, MINUCRA was declared a success as a UN pilot project and was replaced by a UN Peacebuilding Support Office (BONUCA). But the Government was overthrown – again – and the coup was legitimized by a rigged constitutional referendum in 2004 and confirming elections in 2005. Its legitimacy was paper thin and the attempt at a popular mandate opened the "CAR Bush War," lasting until 2012 and compounded after 2008 by civil servants' demonstrations for interrupted pay. The central Government ruled itself for itself.

Government was left to the neighborhoods, not even cohesive regions. "Local order was weakly institutionalized." (Magnuson 2018, 263). Sultanates, chieftainships, local notables all held a weak sway and undercut each other. Governance was especially weak in the Northeastern quadrant of the country, underpopulated, underrepresented, and under-governed, speaking a local Arabic dialect instead of the lingua franca, Sango. The population is more broadly divided into sedentary farmers, mainly in the South, and no-

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[2] I owe much to the excellent dissertation and fieldwork of Salamah Magnuson, Non-State Armed Groups: Social Contracts in Fragile States, Johns Hopkins University 2018, for this account.

madic herders in the North, the age-old conflict over land use and ownership typical of the whole Sahelian area of Africa. This division replicated religious (Muslim / Christian) and ethnic (Sahelian / Sudanese) identities, reinforced after 2004 as the looting, reprisals and suppression intensified. The State became not only absent but repulsive. There was therefore no attempt to take over the State but rather an effort to replace its functions at the local level (Magnuson 2018).

As the local saying goes: "The State stops at PK [*point kilométrique*] 12" (Bierschenk & de Sardan 1997, 441). This means that the President is "the Mayor of Bangui", the capital city, and controls only 12km out of town. He is easy to keep in power and easy to overthrow. Local administrators are posted in other cities, with little actual exercise of State functions, making the issue of neglect even more apparent. As much as anything, identity is fragmented. Tribal belonging matters, Northeastern identity is loosely meaningful although it is not clear who represents it, *Central African* identity is a point to be hidden and fought over, and religious and broad ethnic identity demands assertions and reprisals. But no one – person or organization – represents any of these, in action or allegiance. Religious cleansing, interethnic violence, personal and tribal retaliation, land disputes, cattle raids, and absence of judicial institutions drive continuing civil conflict, and any of these gives a reason for killing (ICG 2014). Out of a population of about 5 million, there are about a million Internally Displaced People (IDP) in CAR and half a million refugees (mainly in Cameroon).

By the turn of the century, local self-defense groups began to be formed here and there throughout the Northern part of the country but particularly in the sparsely populated Northeast, where they were directed against herders and raiders from neighboring Darfur in Western Sudan, where Northern CAR groups were also operating. The current and previous Presidents, François Bozizé and Ange-Félix Patassé, financed small local groups for self-defense. A more focused self-defense project was the antipoaching park rangers or "local management committees," also funded by the UNDP and directed against Sudanese intruders (Lombard & Botiveau 2012). Sheikh Yaya Ramadan, a village chief, former Mayor, and spiritual leader, was the leader of one of the groups. When he was assassinated in May 2002 by a tribal group from Sudan, the groups of Northeast CAR came together to pursue a retributive conflict with the Darfur and Chadian border tribes. After the fourth coup by François Bozizé, the following year, he began attacking the local groups in the region in April-May 2006, galvanizing them and a few movements to form the Union for Democratic Forces for the Republic (UFDR) in September 2006 (ICG 2007).

A competition with the Government for beatings, killings, village burnings and reprisals was launched, with the Government coming out far ahead. The UFDR served as a roving militia, based in the Bongo massif central to the North-East region and attacking Government forces in the towns while repelling raids from Chad and Darfur. It lived off local supplies, gained by begging or looting, and by the diamond trade from mines in the region. As the rebellion continued, Government employees in the region fled and the

Government responded with scorched-earth tactics, exacerbating the impression of ne-glect, and reinforcing the UFDR's protest.

The UFDR did not have a governing structure of its own, or even a political structure; it was as decentralized as the regions themselves; its one identifiable leader, Demane, was the military but not political official. Two early political leaders – Michel An-Nondokoro Djotodia and Abubakar Sabone – were jailed and then released to inactive UFDR units, which lived in symbiosis with rare local chiefs, tribal leaders, and sultans, but short of their open support or structure. So, they performed minimal Government functions as best they could, including health, police, and adjudication, "a collective of vigilantes and activists" (interview, Magnuson 2018, 301). But even this activity was to emphasize the neglect by Government rather than to replace it. It constituted a cooperation of tribal so-cieties of the region, with a protective armed force and alarm bells for attention.

These characteristics left the UFDR with the need either to come to terms with the Government or to raise the level of protest and organization. It signed an Agreement with the Government in April 2007, and immediately began to fall apart. Internal dissidence over the decision to sign, plus Government efforts to coopt and buy off component tribal groups, brought out the weaknesses of the movement, compounded by military defeat in a combat with the French army, but also by personal rivalries, where each aspiring leader had his own group of followers in the fractioned population. A ceasefire agreement was signed in October 2011 with the Government, further splitting the movement over the signature, and the Government did not follow through on its promises. The rigged re-election of Bozizé in 2011 showed the Northeast that no change was likely, no answer to their feelings of neglect. Bozizé was later indicted by the International Court of Justice for inciting genocide and crimes against humanity.

The year after the election, one of the absent UFDR political leaders, Djotodia, returned from exile to reunite the opposition from the Northeast. The higher goal and the common enemy formed the basis of a new alliance. The resulting primarily Muslim Seleka ("coali-tion" in Sango) found success in combat, ironically with the help of Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries. A power-sharing agreement with the Government was signed in Libreville in January 2013 through the mediation of ECCAS (the Economic Community of Central African States). Government again defected and the Coalition launched a major attack in the Northeast, and then occupied Bangui and overthrew the Government 3 months later, the fifth coup. Djotodia was installed as President in May, disbanded the Coalition in September, formed a regional force of his own, the Popular Force for the Rebirth of CAR (FPRC) in 2014, and resigned in February. But the now leaderless troops took off on a rampage against the Christian and Black African South, responding to the claims that Northern Muslims were not "Centrafricans." The Southerners responded in turn with an Anti-Balaka ("anti-balles" or charms against AK-47s) movement. In ceasefire negotia-tions in Brazzaville in July 2014, the Seleka delegation called for a division of the country in a Muslim North and a Christian South, but then dropped the demand. The FPRC raised the level of its goals, calling in August for secession with the new Northeast indepen-

dent State called Dar al-Kouti after a local sultanate, to be established in December. In response, the movement broke apart again, with some fragments clinging to the original goal of attracting Government attention and others aiming to assume State functions for all of CAR, in addition to the FPRC's goal of secession.

The common demand of the rebellion was not assertive but appellant. The population called for the attention that was due to it from Government; it was an appeal from neglect that recognized the role and responsibility of Government. It did not leave the substantive phase to enter into the procedural demand to take over Government until a much later phase, when not only its hopes but also its ability to fulfill them itself had worn out; the demand for secession was vapid. Since the appeal for attention referred to universal conditions in CAR, not just the Northeast, it could have united a mass movement behind a responding Government, but internal divisions of identity kept that from happening. And were such a move to have been launched, a Government would have lacked the skills and resources to meet the demand, despite significant amounts of international aid that has flowed into CAR. So those who were installed in Bangui used the available resources for themselves (Arnson & Zartman 2005).

The conflict has been the occasion of almost annual peace negotiations and ceasefire projects. Although each usually ended in an agreement, it was in turn the cause for rejection and return to combat by fractions of the parties, claiming the agreement was unfair, the signing parties unrepresentative, the needs unmet, or the rewards insufficient. Not only the UN missions, the French support group, and the regional organizations African Union (which suspended CAR in 2013) and ECCAS served as mediators, but also international NGOs such as the Red Cross and local and often ad hoc NGOs such as interfaith pastor and imam groups have served as mediators. Although fatigue has occasionally set in among combating groups, notions of reprisal and continuing provocations have kept the pot bubbling. France, the colonial peacekeeper – in the absence of State builder – wound down its presence in 2012 out of frustration and lack of interest, leaving an opening for a newcomer. On invitation from President Faustin-Archange Touadera in 2017, Russia sent security units of the Wagner Group, provided military training and equipment, and a competing peace effort hosted by Sudan, with an interest in diamonds and neighboring uranium (Searcey 2019). The peace agreement in 2019 left large parts of the country in the hands of the rebellions and was not observed.

The "Mayor of Bangui" has little relation to the rest of the country except to send out a predative army and local administrators who were either ignored or became part of the local traditional structures. These structures are where very limited power lies, holding a social contract with the surrounding populations in the absence of one with any national authorities. But Government is not just a local traditional function; security is handled by coalitions of rebels, rising to nearly capture the capital after the reelection of its "Mayor" in 2019, repulsed with gruesome efficacy only by the Russian Wagner Group, with Syrian and Libyan mercenaries, and Rwandan soldiers.

Libya

Libya achieved independence from Italy in 1951 with a weak monarchy that was overthrown in 1969 by Moammar Qadhafi, an unusual messianic dictator who destroyed the State and replaced it with personalized rule and a corrupt and dysfunctional organization. When Qadhafi tried to return the Government to the people, he found them returning to local tribal structures; when he tried to modernize traditional politics, they reverted to "revolutionary" councils and militias that imposed centralized rule. In place of a social contract, he rewrote the Muslim religion into a Green Book of his own. In place of a national economy, he offered every citizen a guaranteed income drawn from the country's enormous oil revenues.

When this structure was destroyed in the Arab Spring revolt, politics dropped into the hands of tribal militias (Lacher 2020). Under the impetus of the Arab Spring in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt, local protests against the Qadhafi regime arose in February 2011 and were met with violence from security forces. As the revolt spread across the country in many local outbursts, Qadhafi was killed in October and the resistance broke into factions competing for leadership (Mezran & Alunni 2015). A National Transition Council quarreled over representation from the three regions of the country (Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, Fezzan), then hastily drew up elections in July 2012; the turnout was good at over 60% but the result produced a large majority of independents, and the ensuing Government was "entirely cut up by factions large and small" (Lacher 2020, 29).

In addition to the revolutionary fighters, former Government figures, and the exiled opponents, the local representatives of the tribes, villages, and militias made governing impossible. Retired Gen. Khalifa Haftar suspended the General National Council (Parliament) and the Constitution in February 2013 in the name of the General Leadership of the Libyan Army, which did not exist, and in May the GNC, which continued to meet, produced two Governments. Haftar then gathered an army in the East (Benghazi), but was opposed even in his own region by scattered groups; groups in the West (Tripolitania) broke into their own warring factions. New elections in June 2014 brought out low participation and further fractionalization. But the forces were not just regional expressions, but continually shifting alliances among fragmented groups based on local allegiances and interests and competing behavior during the Qadhafi regime and the Arab Spring. The civil war that lasted until mid-2015 was suspended out of fatigue in a temporary ceasefire, with the help of a United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

A UN-backed coalition was formed in Tripoli as a Government of National Accord (GNA) in opposition to Haftar's forces backed by the members of the House of Representatives (HoR) who remained in Tobruk, but the bipolarity was only an illusion, as coalitions frittered and elements moved from one side to the other. An Islamic State in Libya (ISIL) was established in early 2014 in Derna in the East and then moved to Sirte and pledged allegiance to IS at the end of the year; when it moved to take Tripoli, forces in the region reacted and overcame it by the end of 2016 (Warner et. al., 2021). In the East, Haftar controlled, with contestation, the oil refineries in Tobruk, then quietly brought the African

populations of the South into his coalition. A sharp offensive to Tripoli in April 2019 opened the third round of the civil war; even though he was soon rebuffed as his forces came apart, the war continued desultorily as a hot, unstable, self-serving stalemate (Vidaurri 2023).

Foreign "fishing" in the contest began with a bang at the very start, when NATO air strikes responded to the Government's use of violence in 2011 (Theiss 2015); direct involvement was then terminated once Qadhafi was killed, although US forces were involved in clearing ISIL out of Sirte. France, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, and Russia (largely through the Wagner Group) all provided armament and/or forces to various parties in efforts to buttress parties in the struggle to dominate politics; the contest was above all for political influence since Libyan oil was readily available to whoever would buy (even after the boycott over the aggression in Ukraine was instituted). Often foreign fishing was in competition with another rival, as in the case of France vs Italy or Turkey vs Egypt, undercutting efforts for cooperation. The most active force for building a Government coalition to fill the vacuum was led by the UN Special Representatives Tarek Mitra, Bernadino Leon, Martin Kobler, and Ghassane Salame who successively played active and effective roles in shaping evolving politics, but never succeeded in overcoming competing external interference and drawing together a stable coalition.

To the external world, it seemed there were a lot of top-level leading figures, and representative spokesmen. But in fact, national politics drifted on the upper surface of political interaction, without firm ties to the local base and without firm ties to a local clientele. They represented no one and lower-level groups were unstable and fragmented. In a situation that elsewhere might have called for a strongman on a white horse, not even potential candidates for national leadership appeared, and even Haftar, who would have liked to be the exception, could not consolidate his regional coalition, nor extend it to the West. There was a revulsion against looking for a new Qadhafi. The local factions, militias, village councils, and tribal structures overlapped, competed, changed allies, and had no interest in taking over Government, only in defending their own local positions and concerns. Observers' consensus is that this situation is likely to last for a long time. If foreign meddlers might be able to coordinate their interests, they might be able to impose a political structure on the top, but the gap between top and bottom layers would remain.

Yemen

In 1962, with the help of Nasser's Egyptian armed forces, *Yemen* became a Republic with the overthrow of the Zaydi monarchy; however, it was never a State. At best, it was a congeries of tribes, factions, even parties, overlaid but not dominated by sectarian groups, all handled by a central figure with his own interests in remaining in power and acting as a puppeteer of autonomous actors with interests, identities, and followers of their own. Southern Yemen (Aden) became independent from Britain in 1967 as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. A war broke out between a moderate and a communist faction, the latter of which, having won, launched attacks and by 1972 was in open war-

fare against the North. A truce that year gave way to infiltration of Sunni Salafists into the Zaydi (Shi'i) North along with an attempted coup against the President in 1979, and then armed conflict along the border with Saudi Arabia at the end of the decade. When two years of intense and unstable negotiations ended in 1990 in the unification of the two halves of Yemen, it was challenged by a secessionist rebellion again in 1994. A political party led by a leading family, al-Islah, was met in 1990 by the competing existence of the President's own party, the General People's Congress (GPC). Yemeni *mujahidin* from Afghanistan filled the ranks of the leading army commander, Yemen's second most powerful figure, but they also formed a militia of their own against the leading (socialist) party of the South, crushed in Operation Scorched Earth in 1998. A well-entrenched franchise of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was established in parts of central Yemen after 2009, followed by a separate Islamic State branch in 2014.

Ali Abdallah Saleh was President and manager of the Yemeni political system in the Northern part, the Yemen Arab Republic, and unifier of the two halves of the country from 1978 until the Arab Spring of 2011. As a remarkable manipulator, he managed continually shifting alliances, juggled tribal leadership, playing off sectarian factions continually to maintain – by politics and by repression – the union of the factions of two socially and ideologically different regions. "The chaos in Yemen is actually what the Saleh regime wants." (Blumi 2011, 6).

But the most concentrated challenge to the regime came out of the arrest of a local family-sectarian official by a State agent in 2004. Husayn al-Huthi was a local activist and member of Parliament, who felt that Yemen was next after the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and that the predominant religion of Northern Yemen, the Zaydi form of Shi'i Islam, needed to be awakened from its lethargy and reformed. He roused support from his own clan and from the poor, young (mostly under 18), unemployed, ignored in Saleh's coalition politics, wielding the slogan: "Death to America, Death to Israel, Victory to Islam." (Hamidaddin 2015, 125). His family, the Huthis, are an insignificant segment of a larger clan in Yemen, the Hashemi, considered the social elite under the monarchy and (by themselves) the legitimate rulers of Yemen; thus, with lower class and former upper-class associations, they are in a critical symbolic position in the maelstrom of Yemeni socio-politics. Husayn's arrest in 2004 triggered a deadly uprising, followed at the end of the year by a second war upon the attempt to arrest his father, aged 80, and third and fourth wars in 2005-2006 and 2007. In the interim, the wars attracted the attention of the neighboring Saudis and Qataris and the shadow of Iran. The fifth war, in May 2008, ran across the whole North to the gates of the capital; it was halted by order of the President, but skirmishes continued until the sixth war that began mid-August 2009 for 6 months, involving the air force and presidential guards and spillover into Saudi Arabia for another two months. The family revolt for a social cause had become an international war. Both sides had garnered some losses and gains. Militarily, Saleh had gotten stronger, although his elite allies were weakened by their inability to prevail or at least mediate; the Huthis had gathered military strength and social allies but alienated the neighborhood. All the

elements of war, from media spread to mechanized arms and air forces, rolled out over Northern Yemen. But more was to come.

As the leading figures of the Government began to squabble over the handling of the wars, a coalition of the opposition, the Joint Meeting of Parties, finally including Islah as well, began negotiating with Saleh to reduce tensions, but collapsed into a full confrontation in September 2010. Now heartened by the Arab Spring in Tunis and Cairo, growing mass protests demanded Saleh's resignation in preparation for elections in April 2012. Deaths among the protesters, internal schism in Saleh's major tribal backers, splits in the army, an Al-Qaeda in the Arabic Peninsula (AQAP) attack on an army base, threatened breakup of the regional unification, and general warnings against fratricidal vacuum if Saleh disappeared brought an offer from him to prepare a transition after the elections. The street rejected it and the various forces could not unite to accept it. An extraordinary drama of acceptances and re-rejections by Saleh to a transition plan submitted by the countries on the Arabian peninsula, accompanied by military advances of AQAP militants, culminated in assassination attempts on the President, the last one nearly successful, leading to his hospitalization in Saudi Arabia. Upon returning to Yemen, Saleh brought new negotiation maneuvers, but also stalemate between his former allies and the opposition parties and clashes between tribal militias and parts of the army. After almost a year of protest and contentious rivalries, under pressure from Saudi Arabia, the US, and the UN Security Council, an agreement was signed in November 2011; foreign mediation had to turn to foreign coercion, leaving local forces, tribes and factions fragmented and weakened and the resigning President retaining a good deal of the manipulative power he had exercised while in office. But even more was to come.

With the help of a UN mediator, the parties turned to a series of sessions termed "dialogues" to set up a new system under Saleh's former vice-president. Although the results were seemingly successful, the Huthis considered that their share in government was not sufficient, and in April 2014 the seventh Huthi war broke out. As it proceeded, it took on an international dimension, with direct intervention of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates as the principal opponents of the Huthis; Huthis' conquest of most of Northern Yemen including the capital, Sana'a; Huthis' use of drones to bomb the Saudi capital across the peninsula and then to join the Israeli-Hamas conflict and to interdict commercial traffic in the Red Sea; the supply of arms to the Huthis from Iran and Russia; and disease and starvation among the population in the occupied area. Saleh joined the Huthis in 2014, made a formal alliance in 2016, broke it in 2017 and was assassinated by them that year. A decade after it broke out, the seventh war has drifted into a stalemate for the parties, a horror for the inhabitants, and an unmanageable complication for the international conflict of the Middle East.

Although it purports to be a State, the Government has fled to the South, which threatened to revert to its own secessionist independence but with no strong Government of its own. The Huthis are unclear of their purposes and have become a full proxy of Iran. Under the war, the tribal groups maintained their identity but in major cases with splin-

tered leadership, shifting alliances, bitter rivalries, and conflict conducted using the whole range of armaments from tribal militias to drones and planes and heavy materiel. Power lies in the mobilization of both traditional formations and social forces responding to the degradations of a failing modern economy.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan became a Republic with the overthrow of King Zahir Shah in 1973, but the revolution was not completed until the bloody coup of Noor Mohammed Taraki and the People's Democratic Party in 1978, who in turn was overthrown at the year's end by a Soviet incursion to install Babrak Karmal. The reaction was a broad public revulsion against foreign ideas and interference, a mass emigration into neighboring countries, and the rise of the Islamist *mujahidin* resistance throughout the country, divided by geography, ideology, ethnicity, and personalities. Afghanistan was a society of autonomous tribes, where loyalty was given to the ethnic group and its chief, operating through a committee of elders (Bokhari 1995). United only in their religious and social rejection, these groups refused negotiations with the Soviet-backed regime until the mid-1980s. Tireless efforts of the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy Diego Cordovez produced indirect and then finally direct talks with the Soviet Union, and agreement in 1988 for withdrawal of Soviet troops the following year, leaving behind its former proxy Government, just as the Soviet Union was about to collapse.

To provide a stable successor Government acceptable to the various international and domestic forces that brought it to power, both politics and Government in Afghanistan broke down into competing parties, militias, and States, each with its tribal base. Tajik and Uzbek warlords in the North fought for domination against forces in Kabul associated with Iran, to the exclusion of the Pashtun forces in the South, as Pakistan connived to maintain its dominance. A breakdown of order and governance was the scenario, with the government's incapacity exacerbated after the mid-1990s by a devastating drought. Finally, in 1995, a protest movement arose from the neglected and impoverished agricultural Pashtun South, led by a union of Islamic students (*Taliban*) following the fundamentalist Deobandi doctrine, and swept across the country. In a country deeply impregnated with religious conviction, the movement was above all a protest against corruption, impiety, infighting, neglect, and breakdown of order, as had occurred in many places such as Algeria, Sudan, Iran, Somalia, and, earlier, Libya. However, it was itself not focused on governing but simply on restoring piety and order, and it housed al-Qaeda and its charismatic leader, Osama bin Laden, in its war against the West. As the regime pursued its imposition of religious law, attacks by the Tadjik and Uzbek Northern Alliance continued, but the turning point was the al-Qaeda attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, which galvanized Western military attention.

The US and NATO invaded, expanding into the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and by the end of the year, the Taliban were evicted; bin Laden fled with his supporters to neighboring Pakistan. The operation was successful, but the patient was still

infected in its Pashtun area including Pakistan border regions in the South and East, ensuring the long war that bin Laden had promised. The Taliban organized politically in their regions, establishing a *shura* (assembly) of tribal figures, centered on Taliban leader Mullah Omar, and in 2003 began an intensified guerrilla campaign, with kidnappings and assassinations of Government and collaborating local elders, destruction of schools and clinics, and terrorizing villages. ISAF's response was difficult to make effective, unable to provide local protection, unprepared to counter anti-foreign resentment, and often counterproductive in its efforts to identify Taliban sympathizers. A surge between 2010 and 2013 brought US troops to 90,000, plus 40,000 other ISAF troops, Taliban forces being estimated at about a quarter of that figure.

An interim Government under Hamid Karzai was chosen in a conference in Bonn in December 2001, where the Taliban were not invited, confirmed the next year in a Loya Jirga (assembly of leaders that make decisions by consensus), and elected in 2004. Its police forces were understaffed and its military untrained and unprepared for guerrilla warfare. Nonetheless, the new army acquitted itself well in many engagements, but the Taliban continued to expand their territorial control. Karzai, reelected in 2009, was succeeded in 2014 by Ashraf Ghani, who had written a book on nation-building (2008). The election was hotly contested, and the Government was split by rivalries and charges of corruption – rated by Transparency (2013) among the world's most corrupt countries – over the following decade. As a result, it was more concerned with politics in the capital than with grassroots relations, the level on which the Taliban made its progress.

Popular protest movements throughout the country beginning in 2015 produced a joint holiday ceasefire in 2018, then not renewed; but secret contacts were made between the US and the Taliban at the same time, although the Taliban refused to include the Afghan Government, leading the Government to denounce the talks, including the agreement produced in February 2020. The US bargaining position was essentially: "negotiate an agreement for us to withdraw or else we will withdraw." The Taliban resumed violence after signing the agreement, launching an offensive in March that produced "the bloodiest week in 19 years" (Tanzeem, 2020). At the same time, negotiation with the Afghan Government took place off and on over the next year. The Taliban began its last major offensive in May 2021 and by mid-August entered Kabul as Ghani fled to Tajikistan and the US ordered immediate withdrawal, leaving equipment, allies, and civilians behind.

The war in its various phases since 1990 involved every military method and armament, and the gamut from individual terrorist attacks to guerrilla warfare including threats and violence against civilians to full scale air war and heavy armament. It was characterized at every phase by a Government that lost contact and empathy with the population – from the fundamentalist Taliban to the corrupt Kabul bubble – who in turn were in closest contact and identification with local traditional authorities at the village level, with whom they maintained a social contract in the absence of one higher up. In its broadest form, it was a tribal war, a war of the Pashtun return that even in its time of vic-

tory and after was contested by tribal rebels. Perhaps the State had not collapsed, but its arteries had repeatedly hardened, and it lost control of its members.

Common elements in these four cases

These four cases, on passing glance, exhibit a difference that needs no emphasis. But an analytical look shows striking similarities. None has a State: no institution with a monopoly, legitimate or not, of the use of force, no partner of a social contract, no agent of demand aggregation and conflict management. Where there was someone in the capital city capable of sending a representative (of himself) to the UN General Assembly, he had no organic ties with his population, downward as a purveyor of security and welfare or upward as a source of accountability. The contending forces and figures led a lively political existence, interacting with foreign Governments and UN Special Envoys as if they represented something; they even held elections, but were unable to provide Government services once elected (or put in place by a coup). In all, governance including dispute settlement, allocation of goods and services, and focus of identity, is located at the lowest institutional level, in the village, community, or tribe. Larger identities such as religious or ethnic are fractioned and internally contested, as they look for new leaders and authenticities: there is nothing more divisive than religious unity. Rebel forces generally follow their own local interests, independent of local governing authorities but interacting with them. They tend to function for two, often contradictory reasons: to assert and protect local autonomy and interests against competing forces, both central and local, and to put pressure on central Government to overcome its policy of neglect and grant Government services, both welfare and security. Rebellion came most frequently from marginal, disinherited, neglected regions and layers of the population.

Warfare involved a full gamut of operations. At the lowest level, it began with urban protest movements and rural kidnappings and assassinations. It moved into guerrilla uprisings, targeting rival or collaborating groups and individuals, as well as operating installations and combatting police operations. It expanded into territorial control and pitched battles with forces of order, eventually calling for governance over areas of its own. Full military engagement involving air forces and heavy materiel, but also long-range drones and missiles placed it in the contemporary military scene. The ulterior form involved foreign military forces, as individual mercenaries, militias like Wagner, and even foreign army units, in all cases except Yemen, and also missions organized by the UN.

Mediation has little purchase on conflicts of this kind, whether by countries involved (as former colonial powers) or external peacemakers (e.g., UN missions). The groups are hard to contact, inexperienced in conceding and bargaining, uncertain of their own aims, unconsolidated around their spokesmen, and not in control of implementing the results. Meeting to negotiate is often refused as implicit recognition, and signing an agreement often produces a schism. Agreements, when reached, are temporary and unstable. In all the cases, great national dialogs have been held, with UN sponsorship but insufficient re-

sults; in all cases, UN missions, including skilled Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, have been mandated, with more insufficient results...

Fishing from outside is characteristic of such internal conflicts. Foreign involvement makes them proxy wars; rather than being launched as an external State's pawn, internal conflicts provide the occasion for international involvement, sometimes unrelated to the parties themselves, and it is the power vacuum of the conflict itself rather than any party that allows external engagement. Such involvement is often preemptive, occasioned by the possibility of another's engagement. Usually, there is some element of past glory for the intervenor that is open to be retrieved out of the current vacuum – Ottoman in Libya, Wahabi in Yemen, the complex pitch of the Great Game involving Russia, Britain, India, and Pakistan in Afghanistan. But fishing can also occur when a field of raw materials, formerly in another's area of influence, becomes open for exploitation, and when a rebel unit or Government becomes open for influence and control.

These are all characteristics of *Gray Zone Conflict,* and they are amply illustrated in the four cases, among others. In all, the population is the grass under the elephants trampling them in their own name, producing famines and epidemics for those who stick it out (often dislocated as Internally Displaced People) and refugee outflows for those who cannot. Regarding all four countries, external States on the first level have been torn – as is customary – between the values and the interests of their foreign policy, called to respond to the raging humanitarian crisis with aid that often goes to the opposing side, yet risking castigation for ignoring their own values if they do not.

In such foreign involvement, the methods used have reached deeply into the unconventional. On the military side, drones are active (to save combatants' lives); mercenaries are in the frontlines; blockage of food and medical supplies and prevention of humanitarian International NGOs are weapons of war, and attacks on civilian targets (defined as terrorism by the US and UN) are characteristic. Social media and diaspora support, among the modern methods of war, seem to play a minor role in these cases. In all four countries, the conflict is one of supporting one tribal group against another, but with little attention to reaching the tribes themselves on their own terms.

The wickedness of the conflicts is underscored by the fact that international efforts such as conferences and Special Representatives of the UN Secretary General's working from the top down do not put a State back together, as the experience of Cambodia, Bosnia, and Congo, in addition to the four countries themselves, illustrate. States are built from the bottom up, with foreign help selectively and judiciously applied. What it is that starts the bottom-up process is unknown, partly because there are so few examples. The top level of politics is simply too far from the bottom to be helpful, and yet the top acts as somewhat of a lid on the disruption that the second level of regional competition would produce unrestrained. Leaving Afghanistan would leave the pitch open to a six-team rugby match; leaving Yemen would leave a significant upset in the trans-Gulf rivalry; leaving Libya would simply transfer the conflict to a match between the Russian and Ottoman Empire without bringing Turkey any closer to a return to a mutually comfortable role

within NATO; leaving the Central African Republic by the French left the door and room open to Russia. And in all cases, for foreign nations to wash their hands of the situation would simply bring more bad governance and neglect of marginalized populations.

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Possible questions for all audiences

1) The case provides a definition of a wicked problem: a pervasive, complex, and ill-structured problem that contains an interconnected web of sub-problems so that every proposed solution to part or the whole of the wicked problem will affect other problems in the web. Apply this definition to one or several of the countries presented.

2) What steps would you propose to reconstruct a broken State, such as those described in the case study? (If you think the steps would vary widely among such situations, choose one of the four.) What roles could neighbor countries or regional organizations play in such reconstruction efforts?

3) How do you analyze the responsibilities of the past colonial powers in the current situations of their former colonies (France for the CAR, Italy for Libya, etc.)?

4) What the case does not say is that the notion of a State may be culture dependent. We tend to pin our Western democratic ideal of a State to countries which do not share our history and culture of public representation. Is the Western vision of a State even applicable to each / all countries described in this case study?

5) Max Weber stated that States have the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Reflect on what constitutes the sources of such legitimacy. In the absence of a State, who could it be transferred to, if anyone?

6) Taking a hybrid warfare perspective, imagine you act for a State that wishes to weaken or destroy another State without direct involvement of their armed forces. For this purpose, choose any State as the aggressor, and any other State as the victim (those cited in the scenario – or others). Which tools are at your disposal to reach your objective? What game plan would you suggest?

7) The case study does not directly mention hybrid warfare techniques. Which of such methods do you think were at play in the different scenarios (taking into consideration the chronology and availability of different methods at different points in time)?

8) Is every Western, liberal democracy at risk of following the path of the States described in this case study? What makes them immune and/or at risk? You may focus the question on your home country, or another one.

9) Can you think of other States in similar situations (e.g., Lebanon)? Taking the existing cases as references, write the story of one of these other States, and discuss how it resembles and/or differs from the countries presented here.