

# Global Governance, Expert Networks, and "Fragile States"

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## 7 Global Governance, Expert Networks, and “Fragile States”

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*Leonard Seabrooke and Ole Jacob Sending*

The first wave of global governance studies was premised on the notion that the very term signaled a significant transformation of world politics in terms of the plurality of types of actors.<sup>1</sup> In the Introduction, the editors of this volume move beyond this to ask whether, why, and to what end we are seeing a change in the architecture of global governance. In so doing the question is not primarily about the relative power of state and non-state actors, but about the modes of governance – different configurations of hierarchies, markets, and networks – that characterize different issue areas. Our focus is on changes in modes of governance around so-called “fragile states,” which is of particular interest for analyses of transformations in global governance due to the heterogeneity of actors involved – states, international organizations (IOs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and firms – and the different expertise and governance activity it involves, including military, development, and humanitarian work. We provide evidence that the architecture for governance in this area has indeed changed, in terms of which types of actors are important, the interfaces between them, and the resulting modes of governance that prevails.

We seek to explain how these changes in governance architecture have occurred, acknowledging the range of factors identified in the Introduction, such as geopolitical and ideological changes. We also zoom in on an important and often overlooked vehicle of change, namely issue-specific professional networks. We treat networks in keeping with the Introduction’s definition as actors being linked by interdependence, rather than dependence (hierarchy) or independence (markets), but we look more specifically at professional networks that not only share an interest in particular issues (human rights, climate, conflict, health, etc.),

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Mathews 1997.

but also compete to control them.<sup>2</sup> Actors in these professional networks formulate, tinker with, and diffuse ideas about how to define and act on particular problems and link these to operational tasks.<sup>3</sup> Their operations may, at times, resemble those of epistemic communities, claiming expert authority and a shared policy objective, but they also have access to – and seek to foreground – different policy tools, such as military troops, support for institutional reforms, or legal instruments.<sup>4</sup> These networks have been with us for a long time, but they are now more central to global governance, not least because the role and functioning of IOs are also changing.<sup>5</sup>

IOs were established to forge a new institutional framework for world politics after the Second World War. That project rested on a three-legged stool: leg one was the commitment to multilateralism; leg two the pooling of resources to address common problems; and leg three the establishment of an international bureaucratic machinery to manage it all on behalf of states.<sup>6</sup> Over the last two decades, states have systematically reduced their core funding to many of these IOs, forcing these organizations to adjust their operating models to cater to different state interests. At the same time, broader changes in ideas about what constitutes effective management have occurred, where performance assessment, risk management, and competition have replaced ideas about the virtues of the bureaucratic form of global governance.<sup>7</sup> Taken together these trends have produced a system where global governance is an “open system”<sup>8</sup> – where entrepreneurial authority<sup>9</sup> is increasingly important and where IOs are less important as sites of hierarchically based fixing of policy. The result, as we explore here, is that the substantive contents of governance may exhibit tendencies toward differentiation and fragmentation, as different groups or actors advance ever more specific problem-definitions and attendant solutions within and through IOs.

As we explore in the third section, the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq introduced a new set of actors and new governance tools with regard to fragile states, key among which were military and intelligence actors whose views on how to act on, and in, fragile states were different than those found within IOs such as the UN and the World Bank. This development clearly indicates the importance of hierarchy where powerful states, and international bodies such as the UN Security Council (UNSC), set the terms for other actors’ modes of

<sup>2</sup> Abbott 1988; Hoffman 1999; Sending 2015a; Seabrooke and Henriksen 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Haas 1992; Kortendiek 2021. <sup>4</sup> Seabrooke 2015. <sup>5</sup> Abbott et al. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Mazover 2013; Schlesinger 2003. <sup>7</sup> Seabrooke and Sending 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Scott 2015. <sup>9</sup> Green 2014.

operation. But grasping its effects necessitates a look at the professional networks that have a stake in, and competence on, fragile states.<sup>10</sup> We can detect a change from “peacebuilding,” focused on building institutions to support the rule of law and democracy, with development actors in a key role, to “stabilization” and counterterrorism, which entails support for whatever regime is in place to help in fighting insurgents and conduct anti-terrorism operations. This development runs parallel to another transformation, whereby the focus on societal change and institution building has been replaced by an overarching focus on the protection of civilians, with human rights organizations and humanitarian organizations – while different<sup>11</sup> – assuming more prominent roles.

### **International Organizations and the Differentiation of Governance Tasks**

There is no novelty in the role of non-state or private actors in the waging of war or the management of violent conflicts. Charles Tilly’s observation that states are essentially protection rackets captures this historical fact: the appropriation or enrolment of private actors and resources have historically been central for the waging of war and the management of politics.<sup>12</sup> The historiography on empire is similarly replete with examples of the intermingling of public and private actors in the establishment and management of imperial rule. As Max Weber noted, the process of state formation entailed the progressive enrolling of private soldiers into the evolving machinery of the state. Weber writes, for example, that the agents of private capitalism were heavily involved in the bureaucratization of armies, with the soldier owning his own weapons and horses and providing his services for a fee.<sup>13</sup> Weber’s observation also applies today, as the literature on private military contractors testifies.<sup>14</sup> In this historical perspective it is not surprising that efforts to prevent and manage violent conflicts involves a range of non-state actors. The absence of non-state actors in settling conflicts is the historical anomaly rather than the other way around.

Nonetheless, the architecture of global governance that was established with the UN and Bretton Woods institutions had one distinguishing feature: states not only negotiated rules, as they had done in the past, but they also set up a bureaucratic machinery to monitor, interpret, and

<sup>10</sup> Heritier and Lehmkhul 2008.      <sup>11</sup> Barnett 2018.      <sup>12</sup> Tilly and Besteman 1985.

<sup>13</sup> Weber 1978, 981–982.

<sup>14</sup> Avant 2005; Abrahamsen and Williams 2009; Leander 2005.

help enforce these rules.<sup>15</sup> While quite a few humanitarian NGOs predate both the League of Nations and the founding of the UN, a global network of largely Western-based NGOs emerged which advanced goals similar to those embedded in organizations such as the UN. In time, this global network grew considerably, especially from the mid-1970s onwards, and its members served both as implementers and advocates of the work of IOs.<sup>16</sup> In ideal-typical terms this was a hierarchical system, with member states and rule-governed IOs at the top and NGOs playing a supporting role. Over the last two decades, however, this system has been changing gradually. At the very moment when the UN reached its full potential with the end of the Cold War, the system for conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, and mediation efforts started to change. It did so because UN member states launched ever more ambitious mandates to both prevent and manage violent conflicts, but provided insufficient funding for these new tasks.<sup>17</sup> In part to alleviate the gap between goals and resources, but also to tap into the expertise and networks of non-state actors, the UN and other IOs increasingly came to rely on voluntary funding and outside actors<sup>18</sup> to implement conflict-reducing measures.<sup>19</sup> As we discuss in the second section, this has produced a new configuration of global governance with certain hierarchical features (such as the UNSC being important for mandates) coexisting with clear network features, where different IOs (such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank) cooperate and compete with one another but also with NGOs and firms in designing and performing tasks relating to conflict prevention and management.

To capture this evolution in governance systems it is useful to ask how IOs exert control over issues. Extant theories vary considerably in how they answer this question. Theories organized around organizational design<sup>20</sup> or principal-agent theory<sup>21</sup> focus on authority chains, treating IOs as having a set of core attributes but only qua an agent to which states, as principals, delegate authority. For this reason an IO is defined as an actor that is distinct from principals, but an actor that is operating under very distinct constraints, defined by the set-up of the principal-actor (P-A) model. As Hawkins et al. argue, IOs are “bureaucracies that ... can be more or less controlled by their political masters.”<sup>22</sup> Most importantly, IOs are here seen as actors that are created by states,

<sup>15</sup> Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Mazover 2013; Orford 2011, Sending 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Barnett 2012; Hopgood 2006. <sup>17</sup> Graham 2017; Mir 2019. <sup>18</sup> Andonova 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Bantekas et al. 2013. <sup>20</sup> Koremenos et al. 2001. <sup>21</sup> Hawkins et al. 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Hawkins et al. 2006, 5.

but actors nonetheless, since P–A models assume that agents have independent and possibly divergent interests from the principal. Barnett and Finnemore’s seminal work took the description of IOs populated by experts in a bureaucratic system as their theoretical point of departure.<sup>23</sup> They draw on a broad interpretation of Weber’s discussions of bureaucracy to argue that the nature of bureaucratic organization establishes a level of autonomy from the environment, which means that there is potential for IOs to also be authoritative through their expertise,<sup>24</sup> which helps them legitimately claim control over professional tasks for particular issues.

The most significant difference between these theories have mostly to do with the fact that rationalist theories tend to explain IO behavior by looking at the dynamic *between* states and IOs, whereas constructivist and institutional theories borrow more heavily from insights about the bureaucratic characteristics of IOs to make claims about their authority, thereby locating the explanatory thrust primarily with the IO itself. This also holds for more recent work on IOs as “orchestrators,” where a key point is to show how IOs may shape states not directly through commands, nor indirectly through delegation, but through soft and indirect forms of governance where IOs enroll and govern through intermediate actors.<sup>25</sup> While this focus on orchestration is more open to the relationships between IOs and its environment, the assumption – it seems to us – is that whereas the mode of how IOs govern may change, their identities as bureaucratic entities remain stable. Following Abbott et al., we would not expect to see changes *within* IOs in terms of how they are managed and organized as a result of the prevalence of “orchestration” as a mode of governance.

We adopt a view of IOs as “open systems”<sup>26</sup> to draw attention to how factors such as ideological change and actor pluralization can come to shape the boundaries, organizational form, and mode of operating of IOs. In particular, treating IOs as open systems draws attention to the shifting institutional registers that the professionals that populate IOs draw on in their work. Students of global governance have, in the main, been concerned to identify and explain the variety of actors involved, their sources of authority, and the relations between the two. They have – as a consequence – been less well equipped to capture how global governance entails a system where different actors use different types of

<sup>23</sup> Barnett and Finnemore 2004.

<sup>24</sup> And then train policy-makers in member states to agree with them, see Broome and Seabrooke 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Abbott et al. 2016.      <sup>26</sup> Scott 2015.

resources, as they both cooperate with one another and also compete over funding and control over specific agendas.<sup>27</sup> In many cases the capacity to act on an issue – such as human rights protection, conflict mediation, or climate change – is distributed across a range of different actors, such as IOs, states, firms, and NGOs. This suggests that many of the activities of global governance – making rules, enforcing rules – operate in issue-specific recursive cycles where the actors involved primarily share an interest in the issue at hand, which define their outlook and behavior.<sup>28</sup> Actors within these environments may be able to exploit differences in knowledge and try to dominate issues and/or switch identities in different social networks to make sure they are represented among different groups.<sup>29</sup>

Particularly important here is that professional groups compete and coordinate to link issues and define how they are treated, as well as to draw boundaries over who is best equipped to address the issue.<sup>30</sup> This means that organizations, including IOs, do not control issues solely via mandates but also through professional expansion and/or coordination. It is difficult to capture changes in the governance of fragile states without considering the operations of both the UN peacekeeping machinery (Department of Peacekeeping Operations) and its humanitarian operations (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) as well as the UNDP and the World Bank, in addition to different NGOs engaged in humanitarian and development work. For sure, the shadow of hierarchy is noticeable. For example, it was the USA that took the lead to encourage allies to chip in to assist in fighting terrorists and insurgents via UN peacekeeping.<sup>31</sup> But so is the coordination – and competition – between professionals engaged in peacekeeping, intelligence, development, and humanitarian work who became involved in discussing how to use UN peacekeeping to stabilize states where terrorist groups and insurgents are operating, as in Mali and neighboring countries, while at the same time providing development assistance and humanitarian relief.<sup>32</sup> Adopting such a “thin” conception of the culture of IOs – not as that which explains the changing content of modes of governance, but

<sup>27</sup> Seabrooke and Henriksen 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Quack 2007; Halliday and Carruthers 2007; Block-Lieb and Halliday 2017; Sending 2015a.

<sup>29</sup> Seabrooke 2014; Sending 2017. <sup>30</sup> Abbott 2005; Liu 2017. <sup>31</sup> Karlsrud 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Karlsrud 2015; Sending 2015b. The dynamic here is similar to that found in studies of epistemic communities, but with the important difference that it is not based on claims regarding expertise alone, but on access to and control over policy tools – intelligence, strategic, and tactical experience – that emerge as central to policy debates. Cf. Haas 1992.

as structuring environment for different actors<sup>33</sup> – retains core insights from the institutional approach.<sup>34</sup> But it shifts emphasis to the original formulation as found in the works of DiMaggio and Powell,<sup>35</sup> where organizations are seen to be structured by their environment but in a differentiated and open-ended way depending on the particular interface of an organization with its environment.<sup>36</sup> It therefore matters what kind of interface an IO has with its relevant others: professional networks that cut across IOs may be as important, if not more so, in identifying and accounting for where new practices of governance may be forged between distinct groups.

### **The Governance of Fragile States**

Armed with the analytical tools discussed in the first section, we seek to demonstrate some of its purchase by discussing the case of conflict management and in particular the types of governance arrangements that have emerged around the category of “fragile states.” This category is instructive for several reasons. First, the category of fragile states is a relatively new one, but is now a central “issue” or what the sociology of professions often calls a “jurisdiction” over which different IOs both cooperate and compete.<sup>37</sup> For example, the World Bank and the UN recently published a joint “flagship report” on conflict prevention and state fragility, reflecting a longstanding concern within the UN and the World Bank that the two organizations should seek to cooperate more, and better, in fragile states.<sup>38</sup> Second, we see that fragile states is an issue that not only different IOs, but also NGOs and firms, claim competence on.

The concept of fragile states emerged as a central description for the challenge of operating in and producing development in countries plagued by violent conflict, persistent poverty, and weak governing institutions. In 2000 there were no organizational units within any of the major IOs that focused on what we today call “fragile states.” In 2001 the UNDP established the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery in an effort to secure its position as a relevant IO in natural disasters, which was later expanded to include man-made disasters. Also in 2001, the World Bank established a task force and subsequently a funding mechanism for “low income country under stress,” with direct reference to debates about

<sup>33</sup> Kentikelenis and Seabrooke 2017; Seabrooke and Nilsson 2015; Sending and Neumann 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Barnett and Finnemore 2004.

<sup>35</sup> DiMaggio and Powell 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1991. <sup>36</sup> Liu and Halliday 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Abbott 1988. <sup>38</sup> United Nations and World Bank 2018.



“fragile states.” In 2002 the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) initiated a process on “Cooperation in difficult partnerships,” and in the following year the DAC and the World Bank co-chaired a Learning and Advisory Process on fragile states. After these initial discussions at the UNDP, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank on the same issue, 2004–2005 can be seen as a threshold where IOs invested more significantly in developing policies on the issue. In 2004, the World Bank, UNDP, and United Nations Development Group co-authored “Multilateral Needs Assessments in Post-Conflict Situations.” Also in 2004, the World Bank and OECD produced a report on “Alignment and Harmonization in Fragile States.” Moreover, the UN High-Level Panel recommended the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission in 2004, and the General Assembly in 2005 voted to establish an intergovernmental “Peacebuilding Commission” under the auspices of the General Assembly, Security Council, and “Peacebuilding Support Office” in the UN Secretariat, which included specific reference to state fragility. In the same year, the Department for International Development, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Canadian International Development Agency, and United States Agency for International Development all established strategies for engaging with fragile states.

If we jump to 2011, the World Bank launched its *World Development Report* on fragile states, with major policy proposals that include moving bank staff from the headquarters to field offices in fragile states, seeking closer cooperation with the UN, and suggesting that the bank, and other actors, should move toward a “best fit” approach and be more pragmatic in demanding conformity with their standards. At the same time there is marked proliferation of both non-profit and for-profit actors that enter the debate about fragile states and seek to make their mark on how it is defined and acted upon. Oxfam launched its fragile states program, designed to deliver governance projects without going through state authorities. KPMG established a permanent office in Hargeisa, Somaliland, to offer services categorized as fragile states. Other KPMG offices also offered “thought leadership” on how to cope with the politicization of aid going to fragile states, as well as how to improve matching NGO designs to local fragile state capacities.<sup>39</sup>

As the editors note in the Introduction, ideological shifts are important drivers of this evolution in the pluralization of actors. So-called “new

<sup>39</sup> KPMG International 2011; KPMG Kenya 2012.

public management” thinking began to take hold in IOs as a result of donors wanting more bang for their buck. This resulted, *inter alia*, in the outsourcing of key tasks to non-state actors, especially in the field of development and humanitarian relief.<sup>40</sup> One result of this change was that bureaucratic models, based on a hierarchy of rules, defined mandates, and recognized expertise began to change and opened up space for non-state actors, especially NGOs that specialize in advocacy, resource mobilization, and project management.<sup>41</sup> The new actors included not only the likes of Oxfam and Human Rights Watch, but also – over time – a string of firms that specialize in providing conflict expertise and implementation of conflict-reducing measures. Examples include both for-profit consultancies like Oxcon and more established non-profit organizations like the International Crisis Group,<sup>42</sup> which provides country-specific assessments and policy advice, and G4S, a private security company.<sup>43</sup>

This development in the types of actors with claim to competence and expertise on fragile states has effects on how conflicts are understood and acted upon. First, we can observe a change in the complexity of mandates, and we think that this complexity in mandates cannot solely be attributed to a change in the reality of conflict dynamics. Rather, this complexity in mandates reflects a more general trend where “security” and “conflict” are increasingly differentiated into distinct subareas or themes (cybersecurity, insurgencies, terrorism, peacebuilding, humanitarian protection) that are always advanced by distinct groups inside and outside IOs.<sup>44</sup> Second, there is ongoing competition for jurisdictional control between these groups that feature state actors, international civil servants, and a string of non-state actors. These non-state actors have become more important as IOs – such as the UN – have come to rely more on earmarked funding, and on the services provided by NGOs and firms to implement specific projects. As we describe in the next section, the result has been that IOs are less important as authoritative sites for fixing the contents of governance, which helps explain a tendency toward fragmentation of governance around fragile states.

### **Evolution of Approaches to Fragile States: From Peacebuilding to “State” and “Individual”**

The start of the UN’s venture into peace operations is typically dated to 1956, when the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was

<sup>40</sup> Seabrooke and Sending 2020. <sup>41</sup> Hopgood 2006; Karlsrud 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Bliesemann de Guevara 2014; Boås 2014. <sup>43</sup> Leander 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Neumann and Sending 2018.

established. The establishment of UNEF is a good illustration of the “old” model for global governance: a crisis emerges, the UNSC meets to decide on the issue, and the UN machinery is mobilized to act on it. Here, the UN – via the UNSC and key member states – formulates rules, and the UN Secretariat monitors and enforces them. UNEF was organized and justified explicitly to protect a tense political situation. Peacekeepers were here solely focused on acting as a buffer between the parties to the conflict. The Congo operation (Opération des Nations Unies au Congo – ONUC), established in 1960, was markedly different from UNEF in that it was designed to uphold law and order and facilitate the orderly withdrawal of Belgian troops following Congo’s declaration of independence. With ONUC, the protection of civilians becomes a defined task, specified as such, but there is a clear hierarchy: the mandate from the UNSC clearly states that the main objective is that the newly formed government is able to “meet fully their tasks” – and thus to be a fully functional state.<sup>45</sup> During the 1990s, by contrast, liberal ideas about human rights and the rule of law came to define the substance of what peacekeepers were supposed to be doing. The *mode of governance* initially remained the same, however: the UNSC formulated a mandate, and UN peacekeepers, now increasingly cooperating with UN civilian staff to rebuild and transform key state institutions and advance human rights norms, were tasked with the interpretation, specification, and implementation of the rules (or mandates) provided by the UNSC. This was the case in a string of missions – in Sierra Leone, in Liberia, and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The publication of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992 reflects this initial conceptualization of what conflict management should be about. The report argued that peacebuilding must include “advancing efforts to protect human rights” – indeed, it was held that a “requirement for solutions to these problems lies in commitment to human rights” and that “the time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty has passed.”<sup>46</sup> The report signals a focus on building particular *types of states* as a means to produce peace: the protection of civilians and the protection of human rights are conceptualized *within* a focus on state-building in terms of rebuilding and transforming institutions and engaging in capacity building.

Over time, however, there has been a change not only in the tasks specified in UNSC mandates, but also a subtle yet significant transformation in the very justification for why these specified tasks are seen as important. And this proliferation of tasks and the attendant shifts in the

<sup>45</sup> Simmonds 1968.      <sup>46</sup> United Nations 1992, 17–18.

Table 7.1 *Evolution from peacebuilding to rights protection and anti-terror operations*

Period	Goal	Object of governance	Role of individual
1990s	Building peace through liberal-oriented state-building	Societal transformation	Bearer of rights, to be protected by new state structures
2000s	Building peace while also protecting civilians	Societal transformation + protection of civilians	Bearer of rights deserving explicit protection by peacekeepers
2010s	Protecting civilians and combating insurgents	Protection of civilians + protection of human rights + anti-terrorism operations	Primary justification for role of UN in conflict settings

register for justifying peacebuilding is, we argue, integral to the broader changes in the types of actors involved, and in the form of governance associated with it. One expression of this evolution is the genesis of “protection” as an integral part of UN peace operations, as it has evolved in large measure as a result of distinct jurisdictional tactics advanced by actors both inside and outside the UN system to advance a specific interpretation of what “protection” entails, and how it is to be defined as part of UN peace operations.<sup>47</sup>

There are rules about the treatment of civilians during war, as formulated in international humanitarian law. As set out in the Introduction, these rules may be interpreted, implemented and enforced by different types of actors. But these rules are also resources for different actors to seek to change, or add to, an established policy agenda.<sup>48</sup> The general trend in Table 7.1 shows an evolution from peacebuilding as a master frame with a focus on state institutions, with the individual seen as a bearer of rights to be upheld by the state, toward the rights-bearing individual becoming progressively more important as the singular justification for engaging in fragile states.

It was the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that initially pushed for peace operations to include the protection of civilians as a separate task. It did so on the basis of criticisms that the UN had not sufficiently focused on the plight of civilians, but also – and importantly – as part of a move to position OCHA vis-à-vis the

<sup>47</sup> Crossley 2018; Curran and Holtom 2015; Curran and Hunt 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Feldman 2010.

UNSC. In doing so OCHA was operating together with a string of NGOs to push for the establishment of a “culture of protection” within UN peace operations. At the same time, the very same principles – or rules – of protection were interpreted differently by both the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, both of which preferred a more conventional, legal approach to protection (of civilians, and of human rights, respectively).<sup>49</sup> The establishment of protection as a separate task within peace operations also meant that new types of actors established new roles within UN peace operations: UN military staff had to be trained, and had to increasingly coordinate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations about the meaning and implementation of “protection” in the context of peace operations.

Over the course of the 2000s the task of protection became an integral part of UN peace operations. This was done through commissioned reports and specialized training programs for UN staff, as well as the development of new modes of interacting between military and humanitarian staff.<sup>50</sup> In due course, in no small measure through the advocacy by humanitarian NGOs and a change in the justification of peace operations as conveyed by UN leaders, “protection” became a stand-alone objective, alongside that of transforming society in conflict-ridden countries.

An additional shift took place toward the end of the 2000s, triggered by the UN’s internal review of UN operations during the Sri Lankan civil war. It concluded that the UN had not done enough to report on, and seek to stop, human rights violations. In response the UN secretary-general established the “Human Rights Up Front Initiative,” the purpose of which is to “ensure the UN system takes early and executive action” to “prevent or respond to large-scale violations of human rights or international humanitarian law.” This was to be done through “realizing a cultural change within the UN system, so that human rights and the protection of civilians are seen as a system-wide core responsibility.”<sup>51</sup> This was a new framing of protection of civilians, where it became a dominant register for assessing the relevance and credibility of the UN as such, and not just its peace operations. This development, which entails a distinct emphasis on protecting human rights more than protecting civilians per se, had a different register and also different sets of actors involved. Human rights organizations and UN Secretariat staff were at

<sup>49</sup> Stensland and Sending 2011.      <sup>50</sup> Stensland and Sending 2011.

<sup>51</sup> [www.un.org/sg/humanrightsupfront/](https://www.un.org/sg/humanrightsupfront/).

the forefront of developing this agenda, with humanitarian organizations being more marginal. As it has developed as an integral part of the UN's approach in conflict settings, it has placed the protection of human rights as central to the credibility of UN peace operations.<sup>52</sup>

While UN peacekeeping evolved to foreground the rights-bearing individual as both the means and ends of its operations, it also became involved in countering extremism and fighting terrorist groups. This process was de facto headed by the USA, aided by NATO allies and others, and also came to shape also the UN's approach to fragile states. For example, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued a "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," which reportedly drew inspiration from the Bush administration's earlier efforts to rename its approach to prevent and counter violent extremism (PCVE). This is a case of hierarchical relations being manifested in how the UN is being retooled and partly transformed in an effort to shift focus to stabilization and preventing violent extremism. This is also evident in funding patterns from key Western donors, who have channeled significant funds to PCVE programs within the UN system. The UNDP, for example, re-categorized some of their programs to make them fit the PCVE category to attract more funding. Moreover, the UN established, partly through a large donation from Saudi Arabia, the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre within the UN Secretariat. And European donors were significant contributors to the establishment of the Geneva-based NGO called the Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, whose key mission is to engage in preventing violent extremism. This trend is also reflected in how the OECD-DAC changed the rules for eligible development assistance to accommodate funding linked to stabilization operations.<sup>53</sup>

These developments within the UN system, with an increased focus on anti-terrorism operations and stabilization operations, built on experiences and expertise developed outside the UN system, notably through the military operations in Afghanistan. As Karlsrud notes, "the lessons from more than a decade of war-fighting in Afghanistan have over time permeated into the doctrinal thinking of Western forces and their approach to conflicts in international fora, including the UN Security Council."<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Knight argues that "Modern day concepts of Stabilisation originate from national stabilisation doctrines of the

<sup>52</sup> Lie and de Carvalho 2010.

<sup>53</sup> [www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/185-redefining-oda-what-does-it-mean-for-peace](https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/185-redefining-oda-what-does-it-mean-for-peace).

<sup>54</sup> Karlsrud 2015, 49. See also Farrell 2020 on organizational convergence between combatants in military operations in Afghanistan.

‘P3’ – France, the UK and the USA – predominantly to deal with cross-governmental approaches to counterinsurgency operations conducted throughout the 2000s.”<sup>55</sup> These changes within the UN concern not only the substance of the problem definition – to fight terrorists and help stabilize the security capacity of the central government – but also in the *mode* of governance. While there is a clear hierarchy in terms of which states have been pushing for this change, as well as in the fact that these operations are mandated by the UNSC, we can also observe a different trend that is associated with network governance, where governance is done through intermediaries, and where distinct resources are brought to bear on the problem from a variety of professional groups. Karlsrud argues, for example, that there is “a trend of decentralising authority, feeding intelligence into operations on local levels, using a combination of human and signal intelligence sources such as drones, and including special forces to support more conventional forces.”<sup>56</sup>

This decentralization – or trend toward network governance – is also on display in the emerging relationship between UN peacekeeping troops, on the one hand, and other troops operating in the same area. Traditionally, UN peacekeepers have operated independently and specifically not been “party to the conflict.” This has been the bedrock of the UN’s role of remaining impartial. Now, however, the UN mission in Mali – MINUSMA – is closely coordinating with the French military operation Barkhane, a 3,000-strong counterinsurgency operation.<sup>57</sup> As reported by the *Washington Post*, “The French military continues to conduct its own counterterrorism mission across northwest Africa, including in Mali. The United Nations shares information with the French if it is deemed useful for protecting the lives of troops.”<sup>58</sup> This decentralization is best seen as operating within a framework of hierarchy, or perhaps a shadow of hierarchy. Mandates are set by the UNSC, and by the P-5 – China, France, Russia, the UK, and the USA – in particular. But there is a high level of uncertainty, and hence also leeway, in how to interpret and operationalize mandates by those operating in particular conflict settings. A study from the Stimson Center noted, for example, that:

The various ways in which stabilization has been referenced in the four missions’ mandates show that the Security Council does not apply a consistent meaning of the term. The mandates reveal sometimes incompatible interpretations – for example, the view expressed in several MONUSCO mandates is that

<sup>55</sup> Knight 2016. <sup>56</sup> Karlsrud 2015, 44. <sup>57</sup> Bøås 2015.

<sup>58</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/sf/world/2017/02/17/the-worlds-deadliest-u-n-peacekeeping-mission/?utm\\_term=.0558f66c043e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/world/2017/02/17/the-worlds-deadliest-u-n-peacekeeping-mission/?utm_term=.0558f66c043e).



stabilization is an objective distinct from the protection of civilians, in contrast with the view expressed in the most recent MINUSMA mandate that the protection of civilians is a component of stabilization.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time, this development toward more assertive and robust peace operations runs parallel to one where the focus on human rights, and protecting civilians, is becoming ever more prominent as the *sine qua non* of the UN. This represents a bifurcation inasmuch as the former approach focuses on fighting insurgents and helping regimes in fragile states build capacity to control their territory from terrorist groups, and the latter focuses on protecting civilians and their human rights. In contrast to earlier conceptualizations of fragile states within the broader paradigm of liberal peacebuilding, the governance object “society” has disappeared. Or rather, a version of the peacebuilding paradigm is still there, but it is one that is no longer linked to the military component as expressed in UN peace operations. Rather, the broader socio-economic and political focus on peacebuilding and state-building operate in parallel to the focus on insurgents, and on protecting civilians.

While hierarchies persist in terms of relations between actors, we can observe a paradoxical change in terms of the modes of governance. On the one hand, we have the emergence of more “robust” military deployment to stabilize and keep the peace, most notably in Chad, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the UN is now mandated to hunt down and kill insurgents.<sup>60</sup> This is an expression of a hierarchical and militarized mode of governance that is first and foremost focused on the *state* as the object of governance. It is focused on upholding and strengthening the state in question to identify and fight insurgents and terrorist groups. At the same time we see another development in the direction of an increased focus on *individuals* – on the protection of civilians as the foundational justification for UN conflict management, which is partly hierarchical, involving the use of force based on UNSC mandates, but also increasingly networked, relying on professionals from humanitarian NGOs and firms. This represents a significant shift in governance object, where the focus on societal reconstruction that characterized the UN’s investment in “peacebuilding” in the 1990s and early 2000s in Africa and elsewhere is replaced with a focus on the *individual* civilian in need of protection, within a broader focus on stabilization that is focused on beefing up security arrangements to fight insurgents.

<sup>59</sup> Gorur 2016, 11.      <sup>60</sup> Karlsrud 2019.



## Conclusion

What do these substantive changes in attempts to act on and govern “fragile states” tell us about broader trends in global governance? Are the developments we have described necessarily part of, or caused by, changes in *modes* of governance? At one level these changes reflect responses to events that have shaped the international system, key among them the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent war in Afghanistan. One of the virtues of focusing on governance, however, is that changes in the content of policy can be analyzed in light of the governance modalities that are being used. These events and decisions do not determine policy responses and the trajectory of governance. Rather, the architecture of governance and the mode of governance matter for how problems are defined and acted upon. Put differently, governance content is not independent of governance mode.

In our interpretation the developments we have analyzed in this chapter indicate a trend toward issue-specific *differentiation*, or fragmentation, within specialized issue areas and niche competencies: humanitarian relief and human rights, both of which are focused on “protection,” where those professionals that are engaged in doing it use their respective legal tools and expertise to advance its prominence within and outside the UN. This includes the articulation of development as focused on conflict prevention and societal transformation through institutional reform and capacity building, where those that work within, say, the World Bank, the UNDP, or the UN Peacebuilding Support Office seek to make their policy tools relevant to the task of preventing conflict and rebuilding countries emerging from violent conflict. It also includes the articulation of peacekeeping, with an increasingly strong presence of military professionals with experience from operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, focused chiefly on identifying and fighting insurgents. This is the new institutional register in which work on fragile states operates.

Hierarchies have not disappeared, however. What characterizes contemporary global governance is that hierarchies take different forms and shape other forms of governance more indirectly – via the shadow of hierarchy – where both market and network features are integral parts of governance arrangements or modes of governance. One important aspect of these arrangements is that by virtue of the relative increase in openness between organizations, professional groups of different stripes cooperate and compete more independently of their respective organizational homes as they strategize over how to define and act on different aspects of the same issue or problem. The differentiation and attendant niche strategies advanced by different subgroups is at one level an

indication of decentralization and of more “networked” governance. Nonetheless, these features of the system should not detract attention from the hierarchies involved. Indeed, the differentiation that we can observe can be traced to how different professional groups within and around IOs seek recognition and funding in the eyes of more powerful actors, be they powerful member states or collective decision-making bodies like the UNSC. There is thus by now a differentiated system of governance of fragile states, where new tasks and justifications have emerged so that one is now hard-pressed to identify an overarching policy or unified approach to “fragile states.”

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