

Militarized statebuilding interventions and the survival of fragile states

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Abstract: Militarized statebuilding interventions (MSIs) must fulfill two often conflicting goals. At the time of withdrawal the intervenor must leave in place a state able to survive on its own and govern its territory. States only intervene in other states, however, when they aspire to change the policy of the target in ways they prefer. In attempting to balance these objectives, the intervenor “pulls” policy in its preferred direction by supporting a less popular leader at the cost of leaving behind a state that is no more likely to survive over time than its peers. We test our theory and find evidence for this tradeoff by examining all MSIs by great powers and IOs in failed states from 1956-2006. Consistent with the theory, we find that MSIs do not on average have any significant effect on state survival. We also find that MSIs that move the target state’s policy closer to that of the external power have a negative effect on survival, but interventions that do not result in a change in policy do not. This argument and finding temper the optimism of much of the contemporary literature on international interventions. Potential intervenors face a stark trade-off. If they draw the policy of the failed state towards their own preferences, then that state will be more likely to fail again in the future.

Key words: state failure, statebuilding, fragile states

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To succeed in the modern world, militarized statebuilding interventions (MSIs) must fulfill two often conflicting goals. Constrained by the norm that any international intervention must be limited and temporary, at the time of withdrawal the intervenor must leave in place a state able to survive on its own and govern its territory. Thus, one goal of intervention must be to create a resilient state that can endure over time. Conversely, in any significant intervention, the intervenor always has some interest of its own that it wants to secure, such as a government favorable to its own interests, one willing to settle territorial or identity disputes, or an ally in the war on terror. Since it cannot govern the target directly, the intervenor must install a proxy regime to carry out its will. Moreover, as the intervenor's goal can be assumed to be unpopular, otherwise the intervention itself would have been less likely, the proxy regime will likely face domestic opposition from at least one politically significant group in society. This second goal of intervention, to change the policy of the target state in ways preferred by the intervenor, can undermine the first of a state that can survive on its own. In attempting to balance these conflicting objectives, the intervenor 'pulls' policy in its preferred direction by supporting a less popular proxy but at the cost of leaving behind a state that is no more likely to survive over time than its peers. In short, stability is sacrificed for more favorable policies. As a result, we expect that first, interventions will not, on average, result in more stable states, and second, that in previously failed states where policy has been drawn towards the intervenor's preferences, the state will be shorter-lived. Our empirical results show this pattern across a range of MSIs from 1956-2006.

This argument and finding temper the optimism of much of the contemporary literature on international interventions, which highlights the role of external guarantors of peace agreements. In this view, agreements with external guarantors lead to more stable and enduring

peace (Walter 2002, Fortna 2004 and 2008, Matanock 2017). Central to this line of argument, however, is the assumption that the parties have reached a negotiated settlement and the external power is a relatively neutral actor whose role is only to enforce the agreement (Lee 2021). In the interventions we examine, the external intervenor is not necessarily neutral and may have interests of its own that it attempts to impose on the target state. As we shall conclude, a foreign intervenor can likely have either its policy goal or a strong state, but rarely both. Our broader argument reconciles the optimism of peacemakers with the increasingly common recognition that statebuilding is hard and unlikely to succeed.¹

We test our theory and find evidence for this tradeoff by examining all great power and IO MSIs in failed states from 1956-2006, with the period constrained by data availability. We limit our analysis to ‘failed’ states, employing various definitions of failure to test the robustness of our conclusions. We limit our sample in this way so that we are comparing roughly similar states, and then look at the effect of MSIs on subsequent longevity. It would be inappropriate to compare, say, Canada, which is not likely to fail in the future, to Haiti, which has failed several times. To enter our sample, a state must have failed according to one of our three definitions of failure. We then count the years to its next failure using the same definition. Cognizant of possible selection effects, we focus on how long a failed state survives after an MSI relative to failed states that did not experience an intervention. As a baseline, we find that MSIs by great powers and IOs do not on average have any significant effect on state survival. However, we also find that, as predicted by our theory, MSIs that move the target state’s policy closer to that of the

¹ Among many others, see Autesserre (2014), Paris (2004), Paris & Sisk (2009), and Miller (2013). For a review, see Risse et al. (2018).

external power are associated with shorter survival periods, but interventions that do not result in a change in policy do not affect state survival.² In other words, reflecting the tradeoff above, those MSIs that do not (or do not attempt to) change policy do not hurt the state's stability, whereas MSIs that succeed in shifting policy towards that of the intervenor produce states that are generally less stable than other failed states. We show this relationship statistically and in illustrative examples.

A theory of intervention in fragile states

We lack well developed theories of state failure and, in turn, the effects of foreign MSIs on subsequent state stability. We do have clear theories of state fragility in which society is generally understood to be highly factionalized either by class (see Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North, Wallace & Weingast, 2009) or more traditional social formations like tribes, clans, or sectarian groups (Boone, 2003; Herbst, 2000), and institutions are too weak to contain conflict within 'normal' channels. The exact precipitants that push a country over the edge, so to speak, from fragility to failure are many and varied. At the same time, theories of military intervention or foreign-imposed regime change (FIRCs) are general and apply to all states, whether fragile or not (Monten & Downes, 2013; Willard-Foster, 2019). We focus on the intersection of these two literatures.

We conceive of fragile states as factionalized polities that at least have the potential to cycle through policy alternatives, as illustrated in Figure 1. In a two-dimensional model of social choice, assume there are three groups with differing preferences over a foreign policy issue (the

² Importantly, these findings are correlational. Causal analysis is limited by data structure and available methods. We discuss this further in section 7 of the Appendix.

horizontal dimension) and a domestic issue (the vertical dimension). The groups represent the factionalized society in the ‘target’ state (T). The possibility of cycling through the three policy pairs represents weak institutions (Shepsle, 1979). In the absence of institutions that induce an equilibrium, policy may be imposed by force by one or a coalition of groups on the remaining groups, who may then resist. When groups contest policy by violence, we concur with standard definitions (below) that the state has ‘failed.’ As a baseline, in nearly all cases state failure is not a permanent condition. States fail, stabilize, and even in the absence of any intervention sometimes fail again. That is, in the absence of any significant change, the conditions that led the state to fail in the first place will likely cause it to fail again in the future.

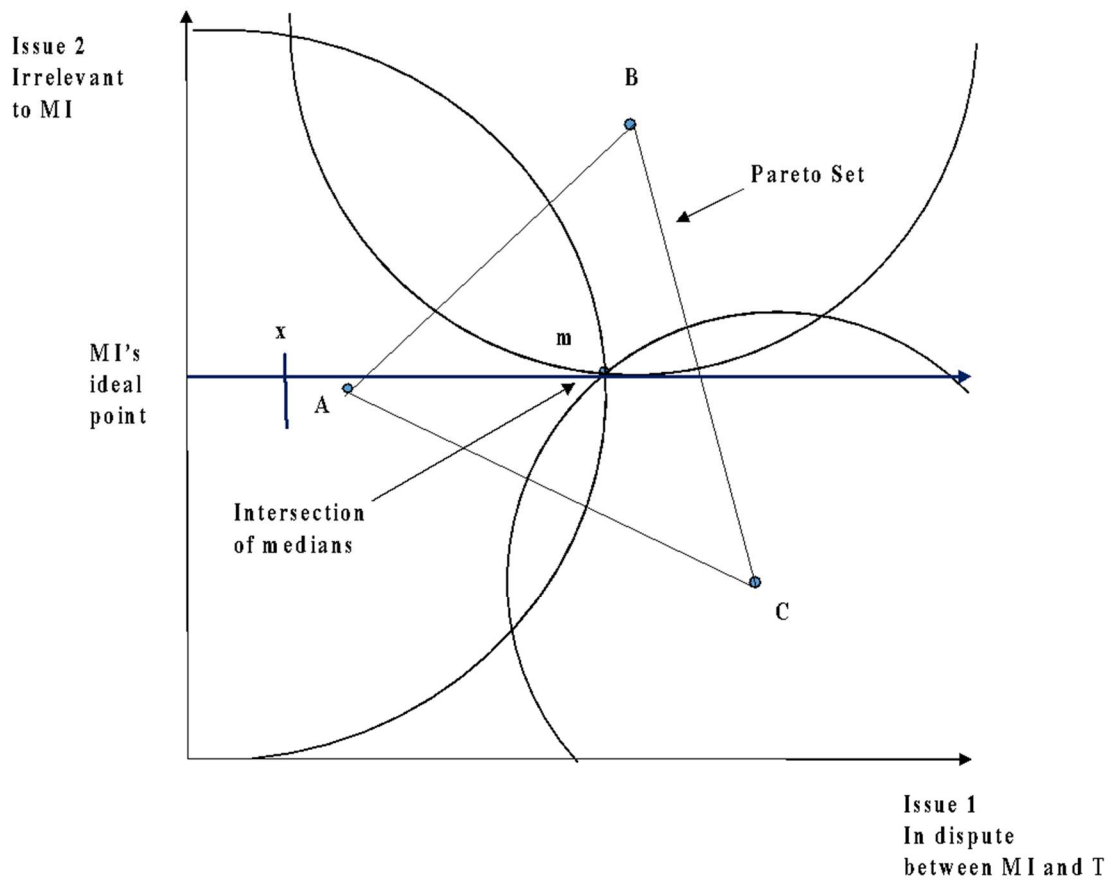


Figure 1. A multidimensional model of intervention

(caption) The target state (T) has the potential to cycle through the preferences of groups A, B, and C. The military intervenor (MI) has a preference only over issue 1 with its ideal point at zero. (The horizontal line intersecting both x and m is equivalent to the single dimension in Figure 2 below). The vertical axis represents a strictly domestic issue over which MI has no preference. The intersection of medians (m) is the point that is likely to be most ‘stable’ over time as it leaves all three groups as well off as possible, though it does not eliminate the possibility of cycling between alternative coalitions of groups.

We assume further there is an external power or military intervenor (MI) with policy preferences over the foreign policy issue as well as a desire for political stability within T. Intervenor vary in the intensity of their preferences over policy versus stability for exogenous reasons.³ Focusing on policy first, we would normally expect the intervenor and the target state to bargain under the shadow of potential war and reach an agreement (either before or through fighting). This follows from the rationalist theory of war, the workhorse model in conflict studies (Fearon, 1995). In the case of military interventions, we can relabel the model and draw some new expectations. As in the rationalist model, the MI and T states are in a pure bargaining game with opposed goals over some issue. As illustrated in Figure 2, the status quo (q) currently favors T, while the balance of military power favors MI. If the two states fight, MI would win with probability p and impose its ideal point (at left) on T, creating an expected outcome of the war at p . Since war is costly to both sides, this creates a bargaining range between and $p - c_T$ and $p + c_{MI}$ in which both sides are better off than going to war. In the traditional setup, any agreement in the bargaining range, say x , is assumed to be game-ending.

³ For a similar model, see Barnett, Fang, and Zurcher 2014. Their outcome of compromised peacebuilding arises when the intervenor and society have shared preferences, which is equivalent here to stating that the intervenor values only stability.

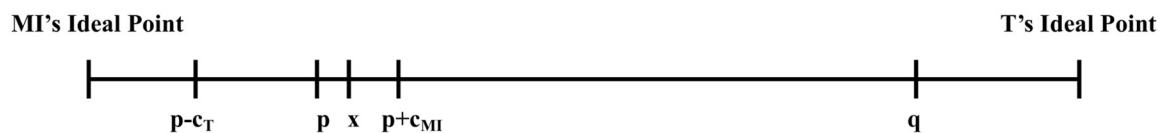


Figure 2. A rationalist model of intervention

Implicit in this standard formulation, however, is a further assumption that T can impose x on its society, and that society will accept this agreement to avoid the costs of war. In a fragile state, however, the government in T lacks the ability to implement x given opposition from its society. Groups with differing ideal points are often contesting for control of the state or traditional social groups have blocked the consolidation of a central state, often because they fear domination by another group (Lake, 2016, 2018). Indeed, in the case of a failed state, it may not even be clear who T is, as it may be a shifting coalition of groups. Even if one group or coalition successfully negotiates an agreement with the intervenor, in the absence of stable institutions able to induce an equilibrium, that agreement may be overturned at any time by an alternative group or coalition in a new cycle. To realize its policy preferences, therefore, MI has little choice but to intervene and impose a policy on T directly. Since today MI cannot rule an ‘empire’ indefinitely, it must collaborate with some domestic group to assist in implementing its preferred policy, which will be the group in T with the policy preference most closely aligned with its own. In the example in Figure 1, this is group A. Through intervention, MI will impose a policy somewhere between its ideal point (zero) and group A’s ideal point (a), and A will agree to this to secure its preferences on domestic policy as well. By strengthening the hand of group A, the intervenor hopes to move policy in its favor. By moving policy towards A, however, MI alienates groups B and C, who will resist the new policy as it is further from their interests than other possible outcomes. They may resist the intervention itself or, equally, seek to outwait the

intervenor and then challenge group A. Once MI signals that its intervention in T is finite, we expect groups B and C to challenge A anew. Thus, after any policy-oriented intervention, we expect continuing opposition and instability in which the state is more likely to fail again in the future.

Alternatively, MI may also have a preference for stability within T, perhaps because failure leads to humanitarian suffering or creates an ‘ungoverned’ space. If MI cares only about stability, it is likely to impose m on T, where m represents the intersection of medians. By itself, m is unstable (and could not be reached before failure) as it is difficult in practice to separate the two dimensions of policy, especially when institutions are weak, and even once imposed, groups still have incentives to form coalitions that will bring the joint policy closer to their preferences. Nonetheless, when statebuilders today seek an inclusive solution responsive to the demands of all of the society, what they have in mind is something close to m , which is more likely to be supported by all groups than any alternative. Depending on the weight the MI attaches to its preferred policy versus stability, it will seek a policy closer to its ideal point (x) or closer to the intersection of means (m , further from its ideal point).

Since we assume that most MIs today have some combination of preferences over policy and stability, we expect that interventions will seldom result in an outcome at m , but more likely something between x and m . Importantly, since military interventions are expensive relative to non-military interventions that focus on mediation, civil society promotion, or political reforms, we expect MSIs to be undertaken by states with stronger policy preferences and, thus, less likely to impose m and more likely to impose something closer to a . This implies hypothesis one:

H1: Failed states that experience a military intervention will, on average, be no more likely and may be less likely to survive than failed states that do not experience a military intervention.

Fully assessing the theory requires information on several hard-to-assess variables, including the goals of the parties and the intersection of medians, which we will seldom observe in failed states. Here, we generalize across a range of cases looking for the average effect of interventions even though we cannot identify the objectives of the intervenors. At this level, we predict only that military interventions will have no effect or a negative effect on observed patterns of state survival. The bottom line is that MSIs do not, on average, solve the problems that led to state failure in the first place and may indeed exacerbate them.

Where intuition suggests that IOs might have weaker policy preferences, we expect interventions by great powers and IOs to have a similar effect for two reasons. First, IOs also have political agendas that likely conflict with domestic factions. In the post-Cold War era, when most IO interventions have occurred, the United Nations has emphasized a liberal model of development that prioritizes democratization and inclusion, which necessarily threatens some domestic interests (Paris, 2004). As above, even when m is imposed as might be expected by an IO, any possible coalition of groups might be better off under some alternative policy. In Somalia, for instance, the UN reform program in 1993 was opposed by the warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid, who believed he deserved to be the next president of the war-torn state due to his role in the overthrowing Said Barre. Aidid was identified by the UN as the primary obstacle to peace, however, and the fighting escalated, transforming what was originally envisioned as a humanitarian mission into a MSI (Lake, 2016). Second, great power and IO interventions frequently overlap in reinforcing ways. In Somalia, again, UNOSOM I was a UN-led operation,

replaced by UNITAF under the leadership of the United States, followed by UNOSOM II as a UN operation. Even under UNOSOM II, however, U.S. troops remained until President Clinton withdrew U.S. forces entirely and the UN mission collapsed. Similarly, in one of the cases we discuss below, the United States intervened in the Dominican Republic during a period of failure but then within days turned the operation over to an Organization of American States mission led by a Brazilian general, though U.S. forces remained in the country for weeks afterwards. As Table II (below) suggests, there is frequent overlap in great power and IO interventions, obscuring the intent and coding of these cases. By this logic and observational equivalence, we do not expect MSIs by great powers and IOs to differ substantially in their effects. Interventions by both types of actors should, on average, have no effect or a negative effect on the longevity of previous failed states.

A further proposition allows for a more direct test of our theory: the closer the MI draws the policy of T towards its own preferences, the more disaffected the population and the more unstable the country will be, on average. Consider the set of cases in Table I. As above, when there is no intervention there should be no change in the probability of failure. When an MI does intervene, there are four possibilities (cases 2-5). In case two, the group (A in Figure 1) aligned with the MI pursues sympathetic policies before failure, the MI intervenes in support of that group, and the group continues the same policy. Here, there is no change in policy and we would expect no change in stability; the conditions that led to the first failure, including opposition to policy *a*, will likely lead to another failure. In the third case, the MI imposes a more preferred policy on T, implemented in our example by group A. Group A is better off -- policy is closer to its ideal point -- but the other groups in society are worse off and will resist the change in policy. The state is likely to be more unstable and more likely to fail in the future.

Table I. Policy change and the probability of failure

Case	MI Action	x_1 (policy prior to failure)	x_2 (policy after intervention)	Policy distance from MI = 0	Predicted Probability of Failure
1	No intervention			No change	No change
2	Intervene and impose A	$x_1 = a$	$x_2 = a$	No change	No change; B and C continue to resist
3		$x_1 > a$	$x_2 = a$	Decrease	Increase; B and C increase resistance
4	Intervene and impose m	$x_1 > m$	$x_2 = m$	Decrease	Increase; C resists, B may resist
5		$x_1 < m$	$x_2 = m$	Increase	Decrease; A resists

When MI imposes m during the intervention, the effect depends on the previous policy relative to m . In case four, the prior policy was close to group C's ideal point or the product of a coalition of B and C, and thus further to the right than m . Here, imposing m will produce a policy more attractive to MI and group A. But group C unambiguously loses and, depending on where m is located, group B may also lose from this action. One or both groups will resist and the country will be unstable, though perhaps not to the same extent as in case three. In case five, the prior policy was relatively attractive to MI and group A, but MI prioritizes stability and shifts

policy closer to the intersection of means. In this scenario, group A is aggrieved. For reasons explained above, we expect most states that are willing to undertake a military intervention will have at least some priority on policy, we expect this particular combination of preferences and prior policy to be rare, though we cannot rule it out. This suggests that, on average:

H2: Failed states that do not shift their policies closer to the intervenor will survive longer than failed states that do shift their policies towards the intervenor during an intervention.

Research design

Our approach is to limit our sample to states that ‘fail’ and then examine the relationship between MSIs and the length of time that a state ‘survives’ before a subsequent failure. Although there are likely multiple paths to failure, limiting our sample to states that fail at least once reduces likely unobserved heterogeneity. Cases of failure are also those in which an intervenor has the strongest incentives to establish a stronger and more capable state, regardless of its political motivations. To the extent we find evidence for political motivations at work in failed states, we would likely see even greater effects in interventions in non-fragile states.

Our observations are country-years following a failure for all years 1956-2006, and the dependent variable is whether the state fails again in the given year.⁴ This setup is equivalent to a hazard model with time varying covariates. All observations are right censored in 2006, the year our data ends. The main independent variable is a dummy variable indicating whether there was

⁴ By construction, our sample of failed states does not coincide with either Fortna’s (2008) sample of civil wars with settlements or Matanock’s (2017) sample of civil wars. When we include variables in our sample drawn from Fortna for the presence of peacekeepers or from Matanock for election provisions, we do not find statistically significant results.

an MSI by a great power or IO that began during the period of failure.⁵ By excluding non-great power military interventions, we hope to reduce the number of ‘opportunistic’ operations in which local rivals attempt to take advantage of a crisis within the target state for blatantly political purposes that do not require a stable state. Great powers and IOs are not immune from self-seeking motivations of course – this is the point of our theory above -- but their operations are more likely than those of neighbors and other smaller powers, we believe, to emphasize the long term stability of the state. By restricting our analysis to great power and IO interventions, we focus on ‘harder’ cases where MSIs are most likely to have a stabilizing effect on previously failed states.

Definitions of state failure

There is no standard definition of state failure (Iqbal and Starr, 2016: Chap. 2). Most lists of failed states are largely impressionistic or defined by the presence of some external armed intervention. The latter is, of course, precisely what we seek to study and cannot be used to identify the set of cases. There are, in turn, many definitions of state failure that offer nuanced typologies based on the degree of failure or which element of the state is failing.⁶ While many institutional and social obstacles can lead to state weakness or even collapse, a common thread in most definitions is whether the state can provide public goods and especially security for its

⁵ Specifically, we include interventions that begin in the first year of a failure though the last year of the failure. Due to the country-year level of our data, we do not distinguish between interventions that began before or after a failure in the same year.

⁶ See Zartman (1995), Milliken & Krause (2002), Miller (2013). For a skeptical view of the concept, see Call (2008).

people (Sisk, 2013: 1). Although economic welfare and growth are, perhaps, the ultimate political goods that matter to citizens, security is a prerequisite for both. For purposes of our analysis we define state failure by the level of *de facto* internal security in a state as measured by observed levels of violence during periods of political turmoil. Our strategy is to use multiple definitions of failure, building out from what we consider to be the most to least restrictive operationalizations.

We begin with the Political Instability Task Force (PITF) definition of state failure, which focuses on the collapse of state authority through revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, adverse regime change, and genocides and politicides.⁷ Revolutionary wars are episodes of violent conflict between governments and politically organized groups that seek to overthrow the central government or secede. Ethnic wars are violent conflicts between governments and national, ethnic, religious or other communal minorities in which the challengers seek to change their status and that meet similar threshold requirements as revolutionary wars. Adverse regime changes are defined by a six point or greater drop in a state's Polity2 score over a period of three years or period coded by Polity as an 'interregnum.' Genocides and politicides involve sustained policies by governing elites or their agents that result in the deaths of a substantial portion of a communal group or politicized non-communal group. We recognize that the PITF definition and cases have been criticized as overly broad and masking different types of state failure (Milliken & Krause, 2002). The observations, however, are united by an emphasis on internal political violence, especially during irregular political transitions. This conforms with our core definition. Due to the relatively small number of state failures, we do not attempt to disaggregate cases

⁷ Available at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>.

further. This aggregate measure labeled *PITF failures* identifies 148 failures which end during our period of analysis.

Table II. Cases of failure and militarized statebuilding interventions

Category	Failures	Great Power MSIs	IO MSIs	GP and IO MSIs	Subsequent failures
PITF failures	148	20	24	38	88
PITF + AC failures	156	22	24	40	92
PITF + AC + transition failures	183	21	24	39	113

As a second measure of failure, labeled *PITF+AC failures*, we combine the PITF episodes with all cases of high-level violence in the country-year. Substantial violence indicates dissatisfaction with the state and a significant attempt to alter the basic institutions of governance. Drawing on the Uppsala dataset on political violence, we classify all episodes of internal violence with more than 1000 battle deaths per year as a case of state failure.⁸ That is, in this second operationalization, there are two ways to ‘fail,’ either through a PITF failure or an episode of internal violence with 1000 or more battle deaths in a given year. There is substantial overlap between these categories, with many PITF failures also exhibiting high levels of violence. The state is counted as a ‘new’ or rehabilitated state after a single year of less than 1000 battle deaths and no PITF failure.

⁸ Armed conflicts that were reported to occur in more than one state were expanded to include a separate case for each country listed. We include internal conflicts and internationalized internal conflicts in our set of cases (Gleditsch et al., 2002).

As a third definition of state failure, we include all years in which the country was coded by Polity as experiencing a ‘transition’ (-88) during which ‘new institutions are planned, legally constituted, and put into effect.’ More commonly found in democratic and quasi-democratic polities, the coders give the examples of Argentina after the collapse of the military junta in June 1982 to the holding of new elections in October 1983 (coded -88 for 1982 only) and Cuba immediately after the revolution (-88 for 1959 and 1960). In this article, we add transitions to prior definitions to create *PITF+AC+Transition failures*.

Table II summarizes the number of cases of state failure according to each definition as well as the number of subsequent failures experienced by the same state.⁹ States enter our dataset only when they have failed according to one of these three definitions. The question is then whether they are more likely to fail again as a result of a military intervention.

Militarized statebuilding interventions

We begin with the list of military interventions from Pearson and Baumann (1993) and Pickering and Kisangani’s (2008) combined datasets. In this collection, interventions are defined as ‘the movement of regular troops or forces (airborne, seaborne, shelling, etc.) of one country inside another, in the context of some political issue or dispute.’ Unfortunately, this dataset of interventions ends in 2005 and limits our analysis; although other lists of interventions have been compiled to include the post-2005 period, they are not consistent with this more extensive

⁹ The number of cases decreases in our most expansive definition of failure because in some cases the broader definition includes years between failures in the narrower definition and collapses what was two failures in the narrower definition into one failure in the broader definition.

dataset. To build our set of ‘statebuilding’ military interventions or MSIs, we examine all cases of intervention and exclude those where the intervention a) did not include troops on the ground, cases where the intervention was b) focused on evacuating foreign nationals, c) was a clearly limited and humanitarian effort, and d) the intervenor did not support the faction which controlled the state at the end of the intervention.¹⁰ As noted above, we include only interventions by great powers or an IO. Table II provides the count of MSIs that occur during periods of state failure. Table 1a in the appendix provides brief summaries of all cases used in this analysis to explain our coding of these interventions.

Controls

Our baseline model is based on the PITF’s global model of state failure. That project found that state failure is best explained by a two-year lagged measure of democracy, discrimination against minorities, infant mortality, and regional violence. Here, we use the Polity2 score from the Polity dataset as a measure of *Democracy*.¹¹ We use the Minorities at Risk (2009) data to construct a dichotomous variable *Discrimination* representing high political or economic discrimination against any group within the country. A dichotomous variable of *Regional Violence* is coded one where four or more states in the same geographic region experience violence, as recorded by the INSCR’s Major Episodes of Political Violence data

¹⁰ This ensures that the intervenor was supporting the government which is in power after the failure.

¹¹ The PITF global model includes a measure of regime composed of the competitiveness of participation and executive recruitment concept. We use the Polity2 variable in order to increase the observations available.

(Marshall 2016). We include the *Infant Mortality* measures from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. This variable is available in 5-year intervals, so we interpolate the data for the intervening years. This variable is also logged and normalized by the global average.

Several of the PITF variables are likely to affect the probability of MSIs, especially *Regional Violence* and *Infant Mortality*, the latter of which is a proxy for state capacity. To deal further with possible selection effects on interventions, we also control for characteristics of the severity of the failure with the number of *Battle Deaths* during the failure period (Gleditsch et al. 2002). The greater the violence, we speculate, the more likely it is that a great power or IO will intervene and the greater the likelihood that the state will subsequently fail again.¹² For similar reasons, we control for annual foreign aid as a percentage of GDP received by a formerly failed state (*Foreign Aid*). Intuition suggests that foreign aid should be negatively correlated with failure and positively correlated with intervention. Table 2a in the appendix contains the table of means for each variable for each definition of failure.

Methods

In order to examine the difference in state survival between failures which experience an MSI and failures which do not, we run the equivalent of a hazard model of the time until a state fails again (Beck et al., 1998). This estimates the probability that a state will fail in a given year depending on the characteristics of the prior failure and annual characteristics of the state. We run logit regressions where the observations are country-years and the dependent variable is whether the country failed in that year. Countries enter our data set after they have failed at least

¹² Table 6a in the appendix shows there is no significant relationship between battle deaths and intervention within our sample.

once and that failure has ended, exit after they experience one year of a new failure, and re-enter immediately after the failure ends. In other words, states are included in our data set only during years after their first failure ends and in which they are not currently experiencing failure. For example, Cuba is coded as failing from the beginning of our dataset in 1956 until 1961. Cuba enters our data in 1962, and since Cuba does not fail again, remains in our dataset until the end of the time period. Cyprus fails from 1961 to 1968 and enters our data in 1969. Cyprus remains in our data until 1972, when it fails again. This failure lasts three years, so Cyprus re-enters our data in 1975 as a second survival period.

Our key independent variable is whether the state experienced a MSI from a great power or an IO during its prior failure. If *MSI* is correlated with longer-lived states, we will observe a negative coefficient on this variable (the state is less likely to fail again). We call this a stabilizing result. Conversely, if *MSI* is correlated with less stable states, we will observe a positive coefficient. This is a destabilizing result.

We run this model under the three definitions of state failure and three types of MSIs (great powers, IOs, and both) outlined above. We lag the controls by two years, following the PITF model. We use natural cubic splines (with three knots) of the number of years since the previous failure (*Survival years*) to account for temporal dependence between observations. We also include *Survival years* as a control variable. We use the BTSCS package in STATA (Beck et al., 1998). We cluster standard errors on the failed state, the potential target of the intervention.

We know, however, that MSIs are not randomly assigned. We might be concerned that states or the international community will intervene militarily in more severe state failures, and so our results may be driven by the decision of where to intervene rather than the effect (or lack

of effect) of the intervention. While we cannot eliminate this concern, we take two approaches to mitigate the threat.¹³ First, as explained above, we limit our analysis to states that have failed at least once. This ensures that any state in our dataset meets a minimum threshold of instability and limits the range of states we are comparing against one another. Second, we identify the characteristics of failed states that predict an MSI, and then control for those characteristics in our regressions.¹⁴ This list of controls is surely incomplete, but by controlling for the set of observables that likely predict both intervention and failure, we hope to lessen the bias introduced by selection effects. In attempting to deal with selection effects through controls, however, we risk introducing unwanted multicollinearity, which might have the effect of driving our estimate of *MSI* closer to zero. Multicollinearity is a potential problem when our expectation is that interventions have no effect on the future stability of states. Across our definitions, the largest variance inflation factor (VIF) is 1.95.¹⁵ The relatively small values suggest that multicollinearity is not likely to be a major source of bias, though it cannot be entirely ruled out.

Results

As a baseline, we regress MSIs during periods of failure on time to subsequent failure (see Table III). As anticipated by our theory, as well as past qualitative work on the difficulties

¹³ We explored a variety of additional methods to address selection effects. See appendix section 7 for a discussion. Since we cannot rule out selection effects, readers should interpret our results as correlational rather than causal.

¹⁴ Table 6a in the appendix contains our models estimating the probability of MSIs within failures.

¹⁵ See appendix table 3a .

of statebuilding, we find that MSIs do not have a statistically significant effect on state stability. This holds across all three definitions of failure, both as a bivariate regression (odd numbered models) and with controls (even numbered models). In most other models, including many robustness checks (reported in the appendix), there is no significant correlation between an MSI and subsequent state survival. The broadly similar and generally insignificant estimates in the bivariate and multivariate models further suggest that our null results are not just the product of multicollinearity.¹⁶ In fact, when there is a relationship, *MSI* is significantly correlated with shorter lived states. In no specification are *MSIs* significantly associated with longer-lived states.¹⁷ This is true even when we separate interventions by great powers from those authorized and led by an IO.¹⁸ In short, on average, MSIs have no significant stabilizing effect on the length of subsequent state survival.¹⁹

Table III. All militarized statebuilding interventions, 1956-2006

	(1) PITF failures	(2) PITF failures	(3) PITF + AC failures	(4) PITF + AC failures	(5) PITF + AC + Interruption failures	(6) PITF + AC + Interruption failures
MSI	0.161	0.615	-0.0257	0.572	-0.0463	0.698†

¹⁶ In a model which includes year fixed effects, MSI is similarly uncorrelated with the longevity of the state. See appendix Table 4a.

¹⁷ See appendix section 4 for a discussion of robustness checks.

¹⁸ See appendix Table 4d.

¹⁹ The largest stabilizing effect that would not be rejected by that models ranges from a 0.007 point to a 0.013 point decrease in the annual probability of failure (Rainey, 2014).

	(0.301)	(0.406)	(0.284)	(0.426)	(0.259)	(0.411)
Democracy		0.0695**		0.0672**		0.0105
		(0.0212)		(0.0227)		(0.0193)
Discrimination		0.401		0.477†		0.621**
		(0.262)		(0.265)		(0.239)
Regional violence		2.076**		2.081**		1.312**
		(0.392)		(0.405)		(0.389)
Infant mortality		1.556**		1.407**		0.973**
		(0.348)		(0.333)		(0.274)
Battle deaths		-25.23*		-24.47*		-25.36†
		(12.71)		(12.02)		(13.66)
Foreign aid		0.170		-0.0751		0.260
		(0.555)		(0.740)		(1.907)
Survival years		-0.00527		-0.0387		0.0551†
		(0.0537)		(0.0425)		(0.0318)
Constant	-3.284**	-4.657***	-3.155**	-4.142***	-2.809**	-3.849**
	(0.250)	(0.610)	(0.222)	(0.546)	(0.165)	(0.429)
Observations	2,560	1,873	2,643	1,624	2,859	1,722
Log-Likelihood	-341.7	-240.5	-363.7	-247.8	-442.9	-300.0
Pseudo-R2	0.0115	0.106	0.0142	0.0917	0.0229	0.0815
Standard errors clustered on failed state in parentheses						
** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.1						

The control variables exhibit relatively consistent effects across models and definitions of state failure. Greater *Democracy* after a failure is associated with a greater risk of subsequent

failure. High levels of *Discrimination* against minorities, *Infant Mortality*, and *Regional Conflict* appear more likely to lead to additional failures. The only surprising result here is that the greater the violence (*Battle Deaths*) during the period of failure, the less likely the state is to fail again in the future. *Foreign Aid* is not significantly correlated with failure.

Overall, as predicted in hypothesis one, it appears that MSIs are not associated with a reduced likelihood of subsequent state failure and may have a destabilizing effect. States that fail and experience an MSI are, *ceteris paribus*, no less likely to fail again in the future. This is consistent with theoretical expectations. Rather than seeking only to build stable states during periods of failure, our theory suggests external actors appear on average to be pursuing political agendas that have countervailing effects.

Policy change

Hypothesis two states that policy shifts during an MSI will affect the subsequent longevity of that state. Central to our approach, states or IOs that intervene militarily are likely to support groups that share their policy preferences, which pulls the policy away from the preferences of other groups and produces a less stable state. An ideal test of this proposition would measure the gap between the policy preferences of the median member of the target society against the observed policies of the target government before and after an intervention, relative to the ideal point of the intervenor. Failed states in which government policy was previously close to the society's ideal point, and in which the intervention moves policy away from society and closer to the intervenor, should produce less long-lived states, all else considered. Alternatively, failed states where government policy was previously far from society's ideal point, and the intervention moves policy closer to both society and the intervenor's preferences, should be more stable following an intervention. Unfortunately, we

have no consistent measure of society's underlying policy preferences. As a second-best alternative, we test here whether interventions that move government policy closer to that of the intervenor are stabilizing or destabilizing. Assuming that the intervenor supports a group in the failed state that is more sympathetic to its interests, countries whose policies become more similar to those of the intervenor are expected, on average, to become less stable than other previously failed states and those countries whose policies do not become more similar should become more stable.

This analysis is biased against finding the effect expected by the theory, as it lumps together cases where the intervenor's policy preferences and the target society's preferences are more similar (and the intervention should be stabilizing) with those where they are not (and the intervention should be destabilizing). To offset this problem, we focus on 'Western' interventions, that is, interventions led by the United States or its Western allies.²⁰ Given that states with policy preferences very similar to the United States display a low propensity for state failure and do not experience interventions, we expect politically-motivated MSIs to, on average, occur in states where society has different preferences from the United States; thus, shifts in policy to be closer to those of 'the West' will be destabilizing. If we could properly measure and control for society's policy preferences, we would expect politically motivated MSIs to be even more destabilizing than found in this test.

To assess this proposition, we use a measure of similarity in UN voting.²¹ In order to compare the results of an MSI to a failed state that does not experience an intervention, we use

²⁰Our baseline analysis pools IO interventions with GP interventions. However, these results are robust to treating IO interventions as a third, separate category.

²¹ See appendix section 5b for a discussion of alternative measures of expressed preferences.

the change in the failed state's S-score relative to the United States over the course of the failure as a baseline (*Delta UN S-US*). We recognize that UN voting is an imperfect measure of policy preferences in both the intervenor and target state. Implicitly this assumes that the MI cares only about the foreign policies of the target, consistent with our theory, but measures only differences in those issues that come before the UN General Assembly for a vote. Accepting that there may be measurement error in this proxy, we do not believe this error is biased in favor of our hypothesis and, thus, is likely to make it less rather than more likely that we will find statistically significant results.

A complication in this test is establishing the distance in policy preferences between the target state and the external actor in those cases where no intervention occurred. This requires making an assumption about the relevant counterfactual of who would have intervened if there had been an MSI. We assume for purposes of this test that the intervenor in all cases would have been the United States, and thus it is the distance in S-score between the failed state and the United States that is relevant. Since the S-scores of the United States and its European allies are very similar, we assume that the expressed preferences of these 'Western' intervenors can be reasonably approximated by those for the United States. It would, however, bias our results to assume that 'non-Western' intervenors have the same policy preferences as the United States. As a result, we divide failures into three categories: no MSI, *Western MSIs*, and *non-Western MSIs*. We then interact the *Western MSI* variable with the appropriate *Delta UN S-US* variable. If the political explanation of intervention failure is supported, the interaction term between *Western MSI* and *Delta UN S-US* should be positive. Given our inability to test hypothesis two under ideal conditions, and the number of assumptions we make here, we must be cautious in interpreting our results.

Table IV shows that Western MSIs that result in a state that is more similar to the United States are destabilizing, as expected. Model 7 shows the results for *Delta UN S-US*. Figure 3 shows this visually. The S-score varies between -2 and 2, where negative numbers indicate a *decrease* in similarity in UN voting with the US over the course of the failure and positive numbers indicate an *increase* in similarity in UN voting over the course of the failure. The figure is truncated to the range of changes in S observed in our cases.²² In failed states that become less similar in their policy preferences to the United States (possess negative levels of *Delta UN S-US*), Western MSIs are indistinguishable from non-interventions. However, Western MSIs that move subsequent policy as proxied by UN votes towards U.S. preferences are destabilizing. In other words, states that become more like the United States in their expressed policy preferences after a Western intervention are more likely to fail in the future. Overall, these results support hypothesis two.

Table IV. Conditional effects of an MSI, change in expressed preferences

	(7)
Western MSI	0.663 (0.484)
Non- Western MSI	2.458** (0.542)
Delta UN S-US	1.661** (0.596)
Western MSI X Delta UN S-US	4.475*

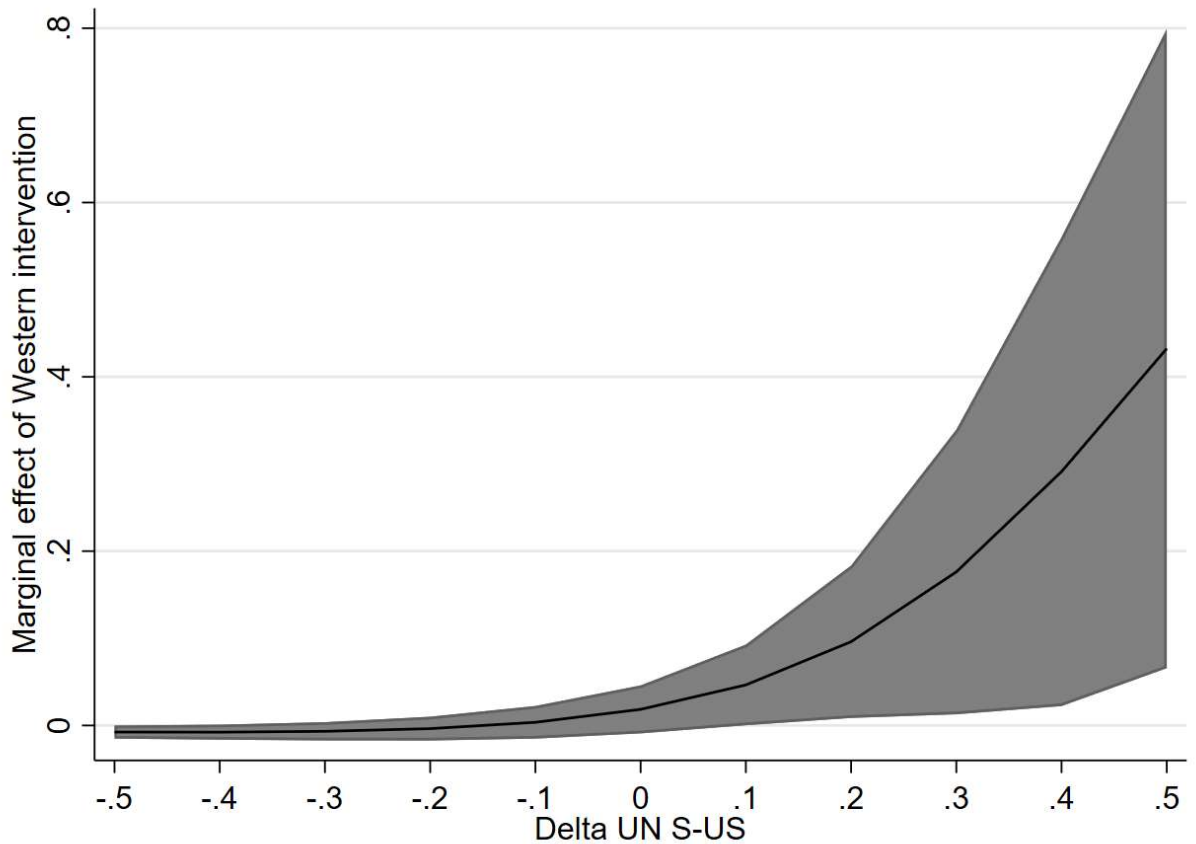
²² Appendix figures 2a and 3a show the histogram of our observation over Delta UN S-US for failures which experienced a Western intervention and those that experienced no intervention.

	(1.888)
Non-Western MSI X Delta UN S-US	0.820
	(1.227)
Democracy	-0.00783
	(0.0247)
Discrimination	0.762*
	(0.332)
Regional violence	1.509**
	(0.400)
Infant mortality	0.984**
	(0.327)
Battle deaths	-12.71
	(13.85)
Foreign aid	-2.175
	(1.811)
Survival years	0.104*
	(0.0451)
Constant	-4.407**
	(0.554)
Observations	1,554
Log-Likelihood	-220.2
Pseudo-R ²	0.175

Standard errors clustered on failed state in parentheses

** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.1

Figure 3: Marginal effects of Western MSIs across Delta UN-US



To illustrate the plausibility of this result, we briefly examine two ‘on the line’ cases that fit expectations. First, though politics in Coromos is tortured and highly personalistic, the island state is illustrative of the larger pattern of biased foreign interventions. Central is that French interventions repeatedly brought pro-Western leaders to power, who then were overthrown when they wavered in this position, causing the first period of failure in our dataset and a new French intervention. The pro-Western leader was then overthrown by rebels opposed to this orientation, producing the second failure three years later. In this case, there was no intervention and Coromos has not (yet) failed again.

A French colony, Comoros unilaterally declared its independence in 1975 under President Ahmed Abdallah Abderemane.²³ Abdallah was almost immediately ousted in a coup led by French mercenary Bob Denard, widely believed to be acting on behalf of the French government. Abdallah was replaced by Ali Soilih, a socialist revolutionary who took a strong anti-French position. Soilih was removed in a coup in 1978, again led by Denard. Returning Abdallah to power, in practice, Denard was the de facto ruler. Taking at first a strongly pro-Western orientation, Comoros under Abdallah eventually turned against the West, increasingly voting at the UN not with the United States but with the Soviet Union. In 1989, Abdallah attempted to disband the presidential guard and was assassinated, possibly by Denard who was tried in France in 1999 and acquitted for lack of evidence. Said Mohamed Djohar (half brother of Soilih) became President but was overthrown in another coup in September 1995, again led by Denard. This near constant struggle eventually led to a first period of failure in 1995-1996.

During this first failure, France sent 600 troops to restore order. New elections in March 1996 brought Mohamed Taki Abdoukarim, an affiliate of Denard, to the presidency until his death in November 1998. During Taki's presidency, Comoros returned to a pro-Western orientation, voting very much in line with the United States at the UN. This is coded in our dataset as an MSI that moved policy closer to that of the Western intervenor during a period of failure. Consistent with our theory, this pro-Western intervention provoked renewed challenge from other groups in the Comoros. Colonel Azali Assoumani staged another coup in 1999, causing the state to fail again only a few years after the intervention. But in this instance, there

²³ On politics in Comoros, see Massey & Baker (2009) and Baker (2009).

was no MSI. Assoumani was elected in 2002 in possibly fraudulent voting. Though politics remain fraught, with several secessionist movements engaging in low level violence, the state has not failed again since 1999 according to our definitions above. Importantly, the first failure that experienced a pro-Western intervention appears to have provoked the second failure soon afterwards.

Second, the Dominican Republic illustrates a case where policy does not shift in favor of the intervenor during the MSI.²⁴ The failure of the Dominican Republic and subsequent interventions by the United States and Organization of American States (OAS) is, admittedly, a bit of a historical anomaly that nonetheless supports the hypothesis. The United States had long supported Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, one of its more tyrannical dictators in the Caribbean Basin (Polity2 score of -9). Reflecting the close relations and Trujillo's active currying of U.S. favor, the UN voting score between the United States and Dominican Republic averaged 0.91 during the 1950s, and reached a high of one in 1958 to 1960 -- or a perfect correlation. As the United States began to withdraw its support due to his increasing human rights abuses, however, Trujillo reached out to the Soviet Union and Cuba in an attempt to gain leverage over Washington. The United States then orchestrated his assassination in 1961 by disaffected members of his regime, setting off a period of failure from 1961 to 1966. Juan Emilio Bosch Gavino was installed as the first democratically elected president in February 1963. Initiating a set of political and economic reforms that challenged the landed elite and its traditional allies in the military, Bosch was overthrown in a coup in September 1963 and replaced by Donald Reid Cabral, but plots of counter-coups and coups continued. In April 1965, rebels stormed the

²⁴ On the U.S. intervention, see Lowenthal (1972).

presidential palace, arrested Reid, and installed Jose Rafael Molina Urena as provisional president. Fearing the return of Bosch, the United States landed 42,000 troops to quell further unrest, imposing a ceasefire. This is coded as an MSI in our dataset. On May 5, the OAS took over the operation and U.S. troops began withdrawing on May 26, setting off another round of fighting. In July 1966, Joaquin Balaguer, the preferred candidate of the United States, was elected president over Bosch. Running on a platform of reconciliation and promising to govern from the middle, Balaguer largely succeeded in doing so (serving from 1966-1978 and 1986-1996), although he continued some of the authoritarian practices of Trujillo (Polity2 score of -3 until 1977). The anomaly is that the United States did not attempt to pull Balaguer's policies in its favor but recognized the need for him to govern from the political center. This movement away from the United States is reflected in UN voting scores. Declining during the period of instability and failure (1961-1965) the UN voting index was 0.89, whereas the similarity in its votes under Balaguer continuously declined to a low of 0.45 in 1969. In this somewhat exceptional case -- exceptional only because of the heavy-handed role of the United States in the past -- the Dominican Republic did not move closer to the U.S. ideal point after the intervention and, in turn, became one of the more stable and prosperous countries in the region.

As these two illustrations make clear, actual cases of failure and interventions are always complex. In both, competing groups vying for power make the state fragile and prone to fail and interventions are multifaceted. But the cases support the proposition. Installing a more pro-Western regime in Comoros during a period of failure appears to have exacerbated domestic instability and likely hastened another period of failure. Conversely, a more 'neutral' intervention -- despite being led by the United States -- did not lead to another failure and may, in fact, have contributed to greater stability in the Dominican Republic.

Conclusion

Even in fragile states, MSIs do not appear to be non-partisan or strictly humanitarian undertakings, as assumed in the literature on peacekeeping and post-conflict stabilization. The empirical results presented here are limited by potential selection effects and should be understood as descriptive rather than causal. Future research should explore stronger empirical methods to identify stronger causal effects. Ideally, we would also like to see more direct tests of hypothesis two, though given the complexities of politics within failed states, the motivations of intervenors, and the difficulties of measuring policy change this may be limited to more extensive and a larger number of case studies than we can include here. However, the empirical pattern presented here provides support for our argument. Given the power differentials between great powers and IOs, on the one hand, and fragile states, on the other, intuition would suggest that humanitarian interventions or the desire for political stability ought to produce more capable states able to stand on their own. But MSIs are costly. Only states with some significant interest within the target country are likely willing to bear this expense. Thus, they intervene for a purpose which they then impose on a target society that is otherwise unwilling or unable to concede to that desire. Theory suggests such interventions will have the effect of weakening not strengthening states. The net result, supported in our empirical analysis, is fragile states that experience an MSI are not more, and perhaps even less, capable of surviving on their own than those fragile states that did not experience an intervention. It is not that intervenors do not want stable, long-lived states. It is that they also want ends typically opposed by at least some in the target society. Our results suggest that intervenors can get policies closer to what they want but at the cost of continued state fragility. The MSIs we are most likely to observe are those least

likely to be neutral or non-partisan. For this reason, we are unlikely to see fragile states become less fragile as a result of these efforts.

Replication Data: The dataset, codebook, and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at <http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets>.

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