



TANA HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON SECURITY IN AFRICA

Discussion Note for the Tana Forum on African Security: State Fragility and the Prospects for Peace in Africa

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Political scientists define a 'fragile state' as a deviation from a developmental norm, i.e. by what it is not. Scholarly and policymaking interest in such a state is restricted to building institutions and putting it 'back' on a developmental path. A fine example of this is the World Bank's World Development Report 2011 'Conflict, Security and Development.' The WDR's central message is the need to strengthen legitimate institutions, and although it insists that such institutions need not be based on a western model, it implies that only exceptionally will they deviate.

A 'fragile state' can also be described as one in which state institutions are subordinated to tactical political bargaining among a national elite. This bargaining is focused on loyalty to the ruler, and is structured around personal or kinship relations, material rewards, or physical protection. Where control over the state is the main mechanism for allocating national wealth, bargaining over state power takes on a life-and-death character, and may become violent.

Meanwhile, globalization changes the dynamics of political bargaining. Political aspirants can obtain resources from regional and global networks (such as neighbouring states, aid donors and diaspora groups) which puts extra pressure on rulers and their limited budgets. This helps explain the increasing difficulties faced by African governments as they try to build political institutions, and why international state-building efforts so frequently disappoint.

Africa policies towards with 'fragile' states should be reassessed, with greater emphasis on pragmatic African practices. Peace-building should prioritize brokering inclusive bargains among elites, rather than the establishment of formal institutions – which will take a long time. The business sector should be brought to the table in the process of building inclusive coalitions. Regional and international coordination should assist in regulating political competition, so that resources can be devoted to consolidating post-conflict stability and shifting towards economic growth.