

CREATING A GLOBAL CENTRE ON FRAGILE STATES

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Issue

- Canada has a unique opportunity as 2010 leader of the G8 group of industrialized nations to advance international collaboration on the problem of state fragility.
- This briefing note presents one possible model for a Canadian-based Global Centre on Fragile States (GCFS) that could be created with G8 support in 2010.

Why focus on fragile states?

- Stabilizing fragile states – countries that are unable to provide basic security and services to their citizens – is one of the most pressing international security *and* development challenges in the world today. These states are especially prone to slipping into self-reinforcing cycles of internal conflict, economic collapse and humanitarian emergencies that too often destabilize regions. Further, when fragile states collapse, they become inviting havens for transnational criminal and terrorist groups.

Why create a new Centre?

- As World Bank President Robert Zoellick has noted, our knowledge of how to deal with the fragile states “remains thin,” and “we maintain this ignorance at our own peril” (see Appendix 1 below).
- Although several fragile states initiatives are underway, policy research remains fragmented. There is a pressing need to address knowledge and coordination gaps that the GCFS could help fill.

What are the gaps? How would the GCFS fill these gaps?

- **Gap #1 – No standing forum for government officials, non-government practitioners and other experts to share knowledge on lessons learned, best practices, and effective coordination**

Problem: Like the problem of cross-national and inter-agency coordination itself, efforts to remedy the coordination problem and to identify lessons-learned have been ad hoc and unsustainable. There is continued urgent need to optimize international coordination in addressing fragile states, including whole-of-government approaches and engagement with non-governmental actors.

GCFS role: Bring together civilian and military officials from Northern and Southern countries, NATO, UN, regional organizations, the development community, and NGOs to identify lessons from past efforts, based on practical experience and rigorous analysis. Purpose will be to bring all relevant actors to the table for informed discussions leading to concrete policy findings.

GCFS activities: GCFS to serve as a forum for discussions of lessons learned and to identify the comparative strengths of all relevant actors in order to enhance coordination efforts. (Unlike the DPKO, the GCFS would not focus solely on lessons learned in *UN-run* missions. Further, unlike both the DPKO and the OECD-INCAF, the GCFS would include a wider range of governmental and non-governmental participants addressing a broader range of coordination challenges.)

Linkages: Builds on Canada’s experience with whole-of-government coordination in relation to Afghanistan. GCFS could feed lessons-learned and policy recommendations to other bodies, including G8 Experts Group on Peacebuilding/Peacekeeping and to the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (neither of which has a standing research capacity).

- **Gap #2 – Insufficient oversight of G8 performance in achieving previous commitments on peacebuilding/fragile states**

Problem: At previous summits, the G8 has commitments relating to peacebuilding/fragile states that, in some cases, have only been partially implemented.

GCFS role: Provide arms-length oversight function reporting on compliance with previous and new commitments on fragile states/peacebuilding.

GCFS activities: Create a standing, independent research team to provide annual report on compliance.

Linkages: Explore possible partnership with University of Toronto G8 Centre.

- **Gap #3 – Need for interdisciplinary research to close knowledge gaps**

Problem: Research on fragile states is still largely stove-piped within traditional policy-academic disciplines (economics, political science, international law, etc.), but the complex problems of fragile states require interdisciplinary approaches (also including anthropology, sociology, etc.) and research needs to be better connected to practitioners’ experiences.

GCFS role: To assemble multidisciplinary teams of world-leading analysts to research specific challenges in fragile states policy. Thematic focus will be updated annually.

GCFS activities: Each year, bring together an interdisciplinary team of researchers and practitioners from Northern and Southern countries to conduct a year-long research project on a policy-relevant theme where there is a knowledge gap (see sample themes in Appendix 2 below) and to report policy-relevant results in at the end of the year.

This part of the program could be loosely modeled on Fulbright New Century Scholars program and the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, both of which organize global teams of researchers to work on a common problem for a specified period.

Linkages: Work with a newly created network of fragile states/peacebuilding research centres (see below) to identify themes for each year’s team.

- **Gap #4 – Not enough Southern-based research**

Problem: Most research on fragile states is conducted by Northern researchers, speaking to each other. Involving Southern researchers in this work, including analysts and practitioners from fragile states, is crucial to (1) building knowledge/practice that does not reflect only Northern perspectives, (2) building research capacity in global South, and (3) encouraging learning and collaboration among Southern researchers themselves.

GCFS role: Ensure wide-ranging Southern involvement in multidisciplinary research teams described above.

GCFS activities: See proposal to create international interdisciplinary teams, described above. In addition, the GCFS would have a fellowship program for developing-country researchers, and perhaps also a summertime institute on research methods, to build research capacity in the Global South.

Linkages: Explore possible partnership with IDRC-supported network of African and developing world researchers and think tanks.

- **Gap #5 – No single “clearing house” for research findings**

Problem: Fragmentation of research across many institutions (e.g., World Bank, OECD-DAC, UNDP, DFID, ODI, Fund for Peace, university-based centres, etc.) makes it difficult to access information and to build cumulative knowledge of best practices.

GCFS role: To collect research (clearing house), report on key findings (knowledge transfer) and identify key knowledge gaps for priority investigation (research agenda-setting).

GCFS activities: (1) Produce an annual report that (a) summarizes recent findings in plain language and (b) provides commentary by leading experts and practitioners on knowledge gaps to be filled. (2) Maintain up-to-date online database of research on fragile states.

Linkages: Establish network of fragile states/peacebuilding research centres to maintain up-to-date tracking and information-sharing on ongoing research activities.

Why not simply establish a network of researchers instead?

- Research networks are relatively easy to create, but virtual networks alone rarely produce high-quality research results that are best achieved through face-to-face collaboration (particularly for interdisciplinary research, which requires researchers to change the way they normally think about and analyze problems). In other words, a network-only proposal might be a simple “deliverable” for the G8 summit, but it is itself unlikely to deliver much substance.
- Specifically, a virtual research network might help to address Gap #5 (the fragmentation of research) by increasing awareness of the full range of fragile states projects underway, but it would do little to address:
 - Gap #1 – the need for a standing forum for officials, non-governmental actors and researchers to identify lessons from past efforts, based on practical experience and rigorous analysis,

- Gap #2 – accountability and oversight,
 - Gap #3 – closing knowledge gaps through interdisciplinary research by teams of analysts working closely together on common themes, or
 - Gap #4 – involving Southern researchers more directly in research teams, and building southern research capacity through fellowships and methods training.
- The GCFS – a physical place where practitioners and researchers can come together, exchange ideas, and develop common approaches – could accomplish all of these goals.

Why can't an existing institution perform these functions? Why create something new?

- No existing institution performs all the functions listed above. In fact, the absence of such an institution is one of the critical gaps in the world's approach to dealing with fragile states.
- In principle, these functions could be performed by an existing institution. In exploring this option, however, three considerations are important:
 1. Can the institution perform these functions, given its existing mandate and areas of expertise?
 2. Does the existing institution have the right leadership?
 3. Does the existing institution come with any reputational "baggage" that could diminish its performance?
- To attract the world's best researchers and practitioners, the institution performing these functions would need to be widely viewed as excellent, and it would need to have the mandate and leadership to accomplish the specific tasks set out above.
- Shoehorning these tasks into an existing institution, in other words, is a risky strategy if the existing institution lacks the right mandate, expertise, leadership and reputation. Producing high-quality work requires the Centre to be launched with all of these qualities in place, at the outset.

Why should the GCFS be based in Canada?

- One of the advantages of bringing international researchers and practitioners to a Canadian-based centre would be to increase the knowledge in this country relating to fragile states – knowledge that would be readily accessible to Canadian government officials, while also creating new training opportunities for the next generation of Canadian researchers.
- The Scandinavian countries have pursued this strategy in creating world-leading research centres in areas of particular concern to them – a strategy that represents a shrewd blend of public-spirited investment and self-interested capacity-building at home. If created in Canada, the GCFS would be the first of its kind in this country. It would make an important contribution to a problem of global concern – responding to fragile states – while also helping to strengthen Canadian-based knowledge and research on this issue.

Why should Canada champion the GCFS?

- Doing so would reflect our interests and our values. Like other countries, Canada is vulnerable to the adverse security effects of state fragility and failure (transnational crime and terrorism, impact on Canadian commercial interests in destabilized regions, refugee emergencies, etc.). Further, Canadians have a strong commitment to decent, effective government, multiethnic

accommodation and the rule of law, and a proud tradition of contributing to international development, peace and security.

- The GCFS would be a wise investment for Canada: (1) it would highlight Canada’s commitment to addressing a global policy issue of particular concern – fragile states; (2) it would establish a world-leading policy research centre that would bring top-notch researchers to this country, creating a store of knowledge that would be readily available to government officials and others; (3) it would create much-needed training opportunities for younger researchers, many of whom leave the country for their higher education, never to return; (4) it would be partially funded by other G8 governments; (5) it would be expected, after an initial start-up period, to obtain funding from private foundations or other sources; and (6) its terms of reference would include an explicit “sunset clause” requiring the Centre to maintain excellent performance or, if it fails to do so, to cease operations.
- Also of interest to Canada: the GCFS could help to perform an accountability role for tracking G8 actions in fragile states.

Who would pay for the GCFS?

- Canada should seek support from other G8 countries for GCFS start-up costs and for an initial period of operation. G8 members would be asked to fund secondments of high level experts (including serving civilian and military officials) to the GCFS.
- After an initial period of full support by the G8, the GCFS should be expected to secure partial funding from other sources in order to maintain operations. There are several foundations with strong interests in this area. One test of the success of the GCFS in its initial period of operation will be its capacity to garner support from one or more of these foundations.

Why would other G8 countries be interested in sponsoring a Canadian-based centre?

- The need for a Global Centre on Fragile States transcends national borders, and the Centre would need to have a physical location, with Canada offering an excellent venue. Canada can be relied upon to create high-quality centre, the outputs of which (a better understanding of the problems of fragile states, and a standing forum for better coordination) will benefit all G8 countries.
- Further, Canada can offer its own hard-won experiences with whole-of-government coordination in Afghanistan and elsewhere. There is also core of fragile states expertise in the Canadian academic and NGO communities.

Should the GCFS be a G8 institution?

- No. A commitment of G8 funds for the creation of the GCFS would be a desirable and worthy deliverable for the 2010 summit, but the problems of fragile states necessarily engage the interest and expertise of a larger community of governmental and non-governmental actors, including many researchers and practitioners from non-G8 members – most notably, non-G8 European states, the BRIC countries, and fragile states themselves – who should be directly involved.

How should the performance of the GCFS be evaluated?

- The terms of reference of the GCFS should include specific goals, including the production of a minimum number of research and policy reports, the maintenance of a useful up-to-date online database on fragile states research globally, and the successful integration of superb participants from around the world in its activities. An impartial method of periodically evaluating GCFS performance against these goals should be established by mutual agreement and incorporated into the terms of reference. Review should include the evaluation of GCFS research products by a panel of independent outside experts.
- All parties should specify in advance that if the impartial external review process finds that the GCFS is failing to meet agreed expectations within a given time, the GCFS should shut down.

APPENDIX 1

World Bank President Robert B. Zoellick on Fragile States¹

When states are breaking down or overcome by conflict, they pose waves of danger. The first surge threatens the people living there: with death and disease, economic stagnation, and environmental degradation. One billion people, including about 340 million of the world's extreme poor, are estimated to live in fragile states. These countries lag behind in meeting all the Millennium Development Goals. They account for about a third of the deaths in poor countries from HIV/AIDS, a third of those who lack access to clean water, and a third of children who do not complete primary school. Half of all the children who do not live to the age of five are born in fragile states. And fragile states have poverty rates averaging 54 percent, compared to 22 percent in other low income countries.

The next perilous wave undermines their neighbors with refugees; warring groups; contagious diseases; and transnational criminal networks that traffic in drugs, arms, and people. As we have seen most recently in South Asia and Africa, fragile states can create fragile regions. It is much harder for economies to prosper if they cannot sell to, buy from, invest with, and even transit their neighbors. Landlocked countries with failed or failing neighbors can lose access to the world economy.

And as the world witnessed seven years ago yesterday, broken states can be the weak link in the global security chain if they are infiltrated by terrorists who recruit, train, and prosper amidst devastation.

The trauma of fragile states and the interconnections of globalization require our generation to recognize anew the nexus among economics, governance, and security. Most wars are now conflicts within states, and fragile states account for most of them. But our knowledge about how best to respond remains thin.

We maintain this ignorance at our peril. The diseases, outflows of desperate people, criminality, and terrorism that can spawn in the vacuum of fragile states can quickly become global threats. Moreover, just reflect for a moment about the loss to the world – the waste of human energy, creativity, invention, and possibility – of leaving one billion people in destitute circumstances.

Fragile states are the toughest development challenge of our era.

¹ Excerpt from a speech by Robert B. Zoellick, "Securing Development," January 8, 2009, <http://go.worldbank.org/EIESKEZ2R0>

APPENDIX 2

Critical Questions the GCFS Could Address

- Interdisciplinary teams of researchers should address specific questions or themes, focusing on filling critical **knowledge gaps** and producing **policy-relevant results**.
- For example, specific topics might include:
 1. Identifying and strengthening the comparative advantages of different international actors (UN, World Bank, regional organizations, etc.) in order to improve coordination and effectiveness.
 2. Harmonizing national “whole of government” approaches with the simultaneous need for international coordination.
 3. Recommending improvements in assessment tools, including metrics.
 4. Recognizing and responding to early signs of “relapse” into violence in states emerging from conflict.
 5. Understanding the role of informal governance institutions in fragile states as sources of, or possible remedies to, instability.
 6. Identifying the most effective sequencing of reforms in fragile states.
 7. Transforming “local ownership” into a useful operational concept.
 8. Analyzing the impact of global warming on fragile states, as well as possible mitigation strategies.
 9. Understanding the relationship between food insecurity and state fragility.
 10. Designing new executive training courses on statebuilding in fragile states.
- Identification of specific research topics should be based on an **annual, collaborative assessment of new research needs**, based on consultation with governments, NGOs, international organizations and members of the GCFS-organized network of research centres.