**The Graduate Programs in**

**International Studies**

***Dissertation Defense***

***Weak Links in a Dangerously Fractured Region: Fragile States as Global Threats***

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In the post-9/11 period a common belief emerged that fragile states are launching pads for unprecedented and unconventional transnational threats. The rise of state fragility or state failure as a paradigm surfaced after the end of the Cold War, but their high risk factor was noticed only later. This is because increased interconnectedness allows information to spread faster and intensifies threat perceptions.

This study recognizes that the idea of weak states, small states, and political decay existed before, and that the notion of state fragility has been widely used in recent years. The conventional wisdom about political decay refers to the ineffectiveness of institutions and corrupt governance structures which enfeeble the state, and which is similar to the current literature focused on domestic factors. To understand the fragility of statehood, the study answers the following research question: “Under what conditions do weak and fragile states continue to fail?”

The analysis explores two core factors: endogenous and exogenous. The academic literature primarily focuses on endogenous factors, mainly political, security, economic, and social performance of states, to determine state capacity and capabilities. However, this study adds geography, or geopolitics, as an exogenous factor causing state fragility in many cases. Therefore, the study suggests a new category, “weak pivot states” in which fragility is not only the outcome of domestic factors but is also due to its geography and position as a “pivot.” The evidence suggests that the impact factor of “weak pivot states” is higher than other weak and fragile states, as they are more susceptible to great power struggles.

As “weak pivot states” sit at the crossroads of major and regional powers’ interests, one of the findings of this dissertation demonstrates that major powers have often supported undemocratic forces, with centralized authoritarian regimes benefiting the interests of a hegemon. The reduction of the threat level requires the provision of stability and the implementation of an effective political order. The findings suggest that fragile states need to reorient their constitutions and laws so as to create opportunity of equality and inclusiveness to its populations. In addition, the dissertation recommends the creation of “spheres of socialization” at intra-state and inter-state level that will allow education for democracy towards state building and establishing accountable political systems instead of interventions in weak and fragile states; and also facilitate an integration process at sub-regional, regional and then global level to tackle the burden of geography respectively.

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