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Violence Intervention and State Failure: Lessons from Somalia and Afghanistan

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Abstract

Dominant international relations frameworks fail to account for post-colonial realities, often obscuring the mechanisms and human consequences of state collapse. Through a comparative analysis of Somalia and Afghanistan, this study argues that external interventions are constitutive of, rather than incidental to, state failure by prioritizing geopolitical containment over institutional capacity and generating catastrophic human security outcomes.

Introduction

Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. It is among the most foundational principles of the post-war international order, designed precisely to prevent the kind of interference that destroys the institutional fabric of sovereign states. Yet the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are replete with examples of that principle being circumvented — through the invocation of self-defence, through Security Council authorisation, through the securitization of threats constructed to justify interventions that serve geopolitical interests rather than the populations they claim to protect. This paper argues that the consequences of those interventions are not incidental. They are constitutive of state failure itself.

State failure remains one of the most contested concepts in international relations, in part because there is no universal agreement on what constitutes a state. The tension between empirical statehood, defined by effective control, governance, and the monopoly of legitimate violence, and juridical statehood which is grounded in legal recognition by the international community, forms the analytical foundation of this paper.

A state may hold full international recognition while its institutions have collapsed entirely; conversely, a de facto governing authority may exercise coercive control across an entire territory without receiving the legitimacy that recognition confers. This paradox is not merely theoretical. It is the lived reality of Somalia and Afghanistan, and it has been deepened, in both cases, by foreign intervention.

The securitization of threats , the political process by which states construct issues as existential dangers requiring extraordinary measures — has served, in both cases examined here, as the mechanism through which interventions were legitimised beyond the bounds of international law. In Afghanistan, the framing of the post-9/11 response as a matter of existential national security provided the rhetorical basis for a two-decade occupation that could not be sustained under any defensible reading of Article 51's self-defence exception. In Somalia, successive United Nations-authorised missions, while formally compliant with the Charter framework, nonetheless reproduced the logic of external governance over institutional development, entrenching dependency rather than building the sovereign capacity that might have ended

it. Authorisation by the Security Council does not insulate an intervention from producing state failure; it merely changes its legal character.

This paper proceeds from the position that intervention, to be legitimate, must satisfy the narrow conditions set out in Articles 2(4) and 51 of the UN Charter analylizying the prohibition on the use of force and its recognised exception of self-defence in response to an armed attack — and that interventions exceeding those conditions, regardless of how they are framed, carry a structural tendency to deepen rather than resolve state failure. Using Somalia and Afghanistan as comparative cases, the paper demonstrates two distinct but related patterns: Somalia as a case of sustained collapse in which colonial extraction and successive external interventions foreclosed the development of autonomous institutions; and Afghanistan as a case of manufactured fragility, in which a foreign occupation constructed the appearance of statehood without the institutional foundation required to sustain it, ensuring that collapse would follow withdrawal.

To structure this analysis, the study is guided by a set of clearly defined research objectives. It seeks to examine how external intervention shapes the trajectory of state failure, not as an incidental factor but as a constitutive mechanism; to analyse the empirical–juridical paradox by assessing how international recognition persists in the absence of effective domestic governance; and to investigate the role of securitization in legitimising interventions that extend beyond the legal limits established in international law.

Accordingly, the paper addresses the following research questions: how does securitization facilitate external intervention beyond the legal constraints of Articles 2(4) and 51 of the UN Charter; why does juridical statehood persist despite the collapse of empirical state functions; and through what mechanisms do external interventions contribute to institutional breakdown and human security failure across the two cases.

The paper proceeds as follows: after defining state failure and outlining the methodology, it examines Somalia's trajectory, then Afghanistan's, before comparing the two cases and drawing policy implications grounded in the argument that institutional development, not military intervention, is the only sustainable path to sovereign statehood.

Materials and Methods

Epistemological Position

This study is grounded in a critical realist epistemological position. Critical realism, as developed by Bhaskar (1975) and extended within international relations scholarship by Wight (2006), holds that structural conditions — institutional collapse, colonial legacy, human security violation, enforcement gaps in international law — exist independently of the theoretical frameworks through which they are observed, but that access to those conditions is always theoretically mediated. This position has two methodological implications for the present study. First, it justifies the application of multiple theoretical frameworks in critical dialogue rather than the uncritical adoption of a single dominant lens — because no single framework provides unmediated access to the structural realities of state failure, and because each framework carries ideological and historical assumptions that shape what it can and cannot see. Second, it grounds the paper's normative claims — that intervention causes state failure, that human security collapse is the measurable consequence, that Security Council reform is a structural necessity — in the assertion that these are real conditions with real causes, not merely interpretive constructions. The critical realist position also provides the epistemological basis for the postcolonial critique that runs throughout this study: the dominant frameworks of Weberian statehood, Rotbergian public goods theory, and

Krasnerian sovereignty were constructed within specific historical and geopolitical conditions that make them inadequate — not merely incomplete — tools for analysing post-colonial state formation in Somalia and Afghanistan.

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design. The comparative case study method is the appropriate design for this research problem because it enables the structured examination of two cases that share critical features — prolonged conflict, external intervention, colonial legacy, and weakened institutions — while differing meaningfully in their trajectories, their relationship to international recognition, and the character of their institutional collapse. As Yin (2014) argues, the comparative case study design is particularly suited to research questions that ask how and why rather than how many — questions concerned with mechanisms, processes, and causal relationships rather than with statistical frequency or generalisability across large populations. This study asks precisely those questions: how does securitization enable interventions that exceed legal mandates, why does juridical recognition persist in the absence of empirical function, and through what mechanisms does state failure produce human security collapse. The comparative design allows the analysis to identify both convergent patterns — shared mechanisms of failure operating across both cases — and divergent patterns — the structural distinction between consolidated failure in Afghanistan and fragmented failure in Somalia — that illuminate the causal complexity of state failure more fully than a single case study could achieve.

The study adopts a most-similar systems design logic, selecting cases that share the critical background conditions of colonial legacy, external intervention, and institutional weakness while varying on the key dimensions under examination — the character of the monopoly of violence, the nature of the empirical-juridical paradox, and the mechanism of securitization-driven intervention. This design logic, developed by Przeworski and Teune (1970) and applied extensively in comparative politics and international relations research, allows the analysis to isolate the specific causal mechanisms producing different outcomes in each case while controlling for shared background conditions.

Case Selection

Somalia and Afghanistan were selected as the two comparative cases on the basis of four explicit criteria. First, both are widely and consistently classified in the existing literature as failed or failing states across multiple indices and scholarly frameworks, ensuring direct relevance to the theoretical concepts under examination. Second, the cases differ meaningfully and systematically in their relationship to international recognition: Somalia's juridical statehood has persisted in parallel with near-total empirical collapse across several decades, while Afghanistan's juridical status is complicated by the fact that its de facto governing authority — the Taliban — is internationally designated as a terrorist organisation, creating a condition in which empirical and juridical sovereignty are held by structurally different actors.

Third, both cases have been shaped by sustained and consequential foreign intervention — Somalia through colonial extraction and successive United Nations missions, Afghanistan through Soviet occupation, United States-led intervention, and a two-decade NATO presence — making them directly appropriate for examining how external involvement shapes, fails to shape, and in both cases deepens institutional fragility. Fourth, both cases exhibit measurable and documented human security collapse across multiple UNDP dimensions, enabling the human security framework to be applied with empirical grounding rather than as a purely normative overlay.

Data Sources and Analytical Procedures

The analysis draws on three categories of secondary sources. The first category comprises peer-reviewed

scholarship on state failure, statehood, and international relations theory, including foundational theoretical works — Weber (1946), Rotberg (2004), Krasner (2004), Buzan, Weaver and De Wilde (1998), Call (2008) — and country-specific historical and political studies — Lewis (2002), Rubin (2002), Ahmad (2018), Menkhaus (2003). The second category comprises reports and documentation from international organisations, human rights bodies, and policy institutions — Amnesty International (2021), Human Rights Watch (2022, 2023), Reporters Without Borders (2023), the UNDP (1994), and the UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda (2021). The third category comprises contemporary scholarly and policy analyses — Faheem and Minhas (2022), Sharif (2022), Thomas (2021).

The analytical procedure follows a structured thematic analysis approach organised around five theoretical dimensions — the empirical-juridical paradox, securitization of intervention, monopoly of violence, human security collapse, and policy implications — each of which is examined across both cases simultaneously rather than sequentially. Within each thematic dimension, the analysis proceeds by applying the relevant theoretical framework or frameworks to the empirical evidence from both cases, identifying convergent patterns where the same mechanism operates in both cases and divergent patterns where the cases differ, and drawing analytical conclusions from the comparison that neither case alone could support.

Operationalisation of Key Concepts

Five theoretical concepts are operationalised and applied systematically across both cases. Weber's monopoly of legitimate violence is operationalised as the empirical condition in which a single governing authority exercises effective and recognised coercive control across the entirety of a defined territory. Rotberg's public-goods framework is operationalised as the capacity of governing authorities to deliver security, rule of law, political participation, and economic opportunity to their populations. Krasner's empirical-juridical distinction is operationalised as the analytical gap between international legal recognition and effective domestic governance, applied to identify the specific form the paradox takes in each case.

Buzan, Waever and de Wilde's securitization framework is operationalised as the identification of specific speech acts through which external actors justified interventions in both cases, enabling the analysis to connect the rhetoric of intervention to its legal basis or absence thereof under Articles 2(4) and 51 of the UN Charter.

The UNDP human security framework is operationalised across three of its seven dimensions — personal security, political security, and community security — applied to both cases to identify the specific categories of human security violation produced by state failure and intervention.

Limitations

Three limitations of the present study are acknowledged. First, the exclusive reliance on secondary sources means the analysis is constrained by the availability, scope, and framing of existing scholarship and reporting. Second, the two-case comparative design limits the generalisability of the findings — the conclusions drawn from Somalia and Afghanistan may not apply without modification to other cases of state failure globally.

Third, the application of Western-derived theoretical frameworks to post-colonial contexts carries ideological risk even when those frameworks are applied with critical attentiveness to their limitations. The postcolonial critique embedded throughout this analysis mitigates but does not eliminate this risk, and future scholarship would benefit from developing frameworks constructed from within the political and historical traditions of the Global South.

Critical Literature Review

1. Weber — Monopoly of Legitimate Violence

Max Weber's definition of the state as the entity that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory remains the most widely cited foundation for analysing state failure (Weber, 1946). Its utility lies in its clarity: a state that cannot control violence within its borders has, by this measure, failed in its most fundamental function. Applied to Somalia and Afghanistan, the framework identifies with precision the point at which central authority collapsed — when non-state actors, whether clan militias, al-Shabaab, or the Taliban, assumed coercive control that the formal state could not contest.

However, Weber's framework carries significant limitations that postcolonial and critical scholars have persistently foregrounded. The concept presupposes that legitimacy is a stable, self-evident quality conferred by effective control — a presumption that reflects the specific historical conditions of European state formation rather than the colonial and post-colonial contexts in which Somalia and Afghanistan developed. Weber does not account for cases where legitimacy is contested across multiple axes simultaneously — where a governing authority may command coercive control while being internationally designated as illegitimate, as is precisely the case with the Taliban.

Nor does his framework address the question of legitimate violence exercised against whom and for whose benefit. In both Somalia and Afghanistan, the monopoly of violence has been wielded systematically against women, sexual minorities, journalists, and political dissidents — populations whose exclusion from the framework of legitimate protection Weber's model renders invisible. As Doty (1996) and others within postcolonial IR have argued, the Weberian state model encodes a normative hierarchy in which non-Western political formations are measured against a standard they were never designed to meet.

Rotberg — Public Goods and the Hierarchy of State Failure

Robert Rotberg's public-goods framework offers a more granular diagnostic tool, classifying states along a spectrum from strong- to weak to failing to failed on the basis of their capacity to deliver security, rule of law, political participation, and economic opportunity to their populations (Rotberg, 2004). The framework is valuable precisely because it shifts attention from the formal attributes of statehood to its substantive performance, making it possible to assess degrees of failure rather than treating collapse as binary.

Yet Rotberg's model carries normative assumptions that have been challenged on both empirical and normative grounds. The public goods he identifies as markers of state success — liberal democratic participation, market-oriented economic management, individual rights — reflect a particular Western developmental template. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) and others working within decolonial frameworks have argued that the failed state literature functions ideologically to naturalise Western intervention by constructing non-Western states as deficient against a standard of statehood that was itself imposed through colonial violence. In the case of Somalia, this critique has particular force: the public goods that Rotberg's framework identifies as absent were systematically extracted by colonial powers and never replaced. This paper applies Rotberg's framework while remaining critically attentive to its ideological freight.

Krasner — Sovereignty, Recognition, and the Empirical-Juridical Paradox

Stephen Krasner's distinction between domestic sovereignty the effective organisation of authority within a territory and international legal sovereignty the recognition of statehood by the international community provides the analytical foundation for understanding the central paradox this paper examines (Krasner,

2004). His framework makes it possible to hold simultaneously the observation that Somalia is a recognised state and the observation that it exercises no meaningful domestic authority, without treating one fact as negating the other.

Krasner's framework is, however, largely silent on the human consequences of this paradox. His analysis operates at the level of institutional and systemic arrangements, treating sovereignty primarily as a problem of international order rather than as a condition that determines the security, rights, and life chances of populations. The gap between juridical recognition and empirical reality that Krasner identifies is not merely an analytical puzzle; it is the space in which arbitrary detention, the criminalisation of sexual identity, the suppression of political expression, and the systematic exclusion of women from public life become possible shielded from international accountability by the fiction of sovereign recognition.

Call- The Failed State Label as Western Construct

Charles Call's critique of the failed state concept provides an essential postcolonial corrective to the frameworks surveyed above. Call (2008) argues that the failed state label is not a neutral analytical category but a politically constructed designation that has historically served to justify external intervention, legitimate the imposition of externally designed governance templates, and obscure indigenous political arrangements that do not conform to Westphalian norms. In Somalia's case, the clan system has historically provided localised order — dispute resolution, resource allocation, community protection — that the failed state designation systematically renders invisible.

Call's critique is indispensable to this paper's argument precisely because it exposes the ideological function of the securitization of failed states. If the failed state label is a Western political construction, then the interventions it authorises are not neutral humanitarian or security operations, but exercises of geopolitical power conducted under the cover of international norms. This is not to deny the reality of institutional collapse or humanitarian catastrophe in either Somalia or Afghanistan; it is to insist that the frameworks used to interpret and respond to that collapse are themselves part of the problem this paper seeks to analyse.

Buzan, Weaver and De Wilde Securitization and the Politics of Threat Construction

The Copenhagen School's securitization theory, developed most fully in Buzan, Weaver, and de Wilde's Security: A New Framework for Analysis (1998), provides the analytical tools to understand how political actors construct issues as existential threats requiring extraordinary measures beyond the bounds of normal political process. Securitization, in this framework, is a speech act: a performative claim that a referent object faces an existential threat from a designated enemy, and that this threat justifies exceptional responses. The theory is directly applicable to both cases examined in this paper. In Afghanistan, the post-9/11 securitization of terrorism as an existential threat to the United States provided the rhetorical architecture for a two-decade occupation that could not be sustained under any defensible reading of Article 51. The subsequent reframing of the occupation as a mission to protect Afghan women's rights constituted a secondary securitization move extending a military presence whose original justification had been exhausted.

In Somalia, securitization operated through a different register. The international framing of Somalia as a source of piracy, terrorism, and humanitarian catastrophe constructed the country as a threat to regional and global stability, providing the basis for successive UN-authorised interventions under Chapter VII of the Charter. As Hansen (2000) has argued, securitization theory must be attentive to whose security is being protected and whose is being sacrificed in the process: in both Somalia and Afghanistan, the

securitization of external threats consistently took precedence over the human security of the populations those interventions claimed to protect.

UNDP Human Security Recentring the Analysis on Populations

The concept of human security, introduced in the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 Human Development Report, represents a fundamental reorientation of security analysis away from the state as the primary referent object and toward the individual. The report identified seven dimensions of human security — economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political — arguing that genuine security requires freedom from want and freedom from fear for every individual, not merely the protection of state borders and sovereign institutions (UNDP, 1994).

In both Somalia and Afghanistan, the collapse of human security is measurable across multiple dimensions. Personal security has been systematically violated through arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killing by state and non-state actors alike. Political security has been absent for decades in both cases, with journalists among the most targeted populations in each country. Community security has been catastrophically violated through the criminalisation of homosexuality, which carries the death penalty under both Somali federal law and Taliban governance, as well as through the systematic exclusion of women from economic, educational, and political participation. These are not peripheral concerns; they are the substantive content of state failure as experienced by the people living within it.

Synthesis — Why All Five Frameworks Are Necessary

Each of the frameworks surveyed above illuminates a dimension of state failure that the others cannot fully capture. Weber identifies the moment of institutional collapse; Rotberg maps its substantive consequences for public goods delivery; Krasner names the paradox of recognition without function; Call exposes the ideological work performed by the failed state label itself; securitization theory explains the political mechanism through which interventions are justified and extended beyond legal limits; and human security recentres the analysis on the populations who bear the consequences of both failure and intervention. No single framework is sufficient. Weber without human security produces an analysis blind to who bears the cost of captured or absent state violence. Krasner without Call produces an analysis that naturalises Western standards of sovereignty. This paper therefore applies all five frameworks in critical dialogue, foregrounding postcolonial and human security critiques throughout, in order to construct an analysis of Somalia and Afghanistan that is both theoretically rigorous and attentive to the full human cost of state failure and the interventions conducted in its name.

Defining State Failure

Defining what it means to be a state is not an easy task, and the definitions are not universally agreed upon. Scholars continue to debate what the correct framework is. Some rely on Weber's definition of the monopoly of violence (Weber, 1946), while others emphasize the role of legal recognition by other states (Krasner, 2004). These two ideas — empirical and juridical — set the boundaries for most of the debate, but they are not without critique. A state might hold international recognition but at the same time be unable to control its own borders or deliver basic services, which is exactly what we see with Somalia and, to a different extent, Afghanistan.

The empirical model focuses on whether or not a government actually functions — meaning whether it can control violence, provide institutions, and govern the people (Rotberg, 2004). In contrast, the juridical model centres on recognition; in other words, if the United Nations and the international community accept the state, then it exists regardless of what is happening inside its borders (Schwarz and Corral, 2011). This split makes it difficult to define failure because, in practice, states might pass in one model but fail in the

other. Afghanistan is an example of that paradox: it has recognition, but its empirical functions have collapsed multiple times.

Fragile states are sometimes mixed into this debate, and scholars try to distinguish between fragility and failure, but it is not always clear cut. A fragile state still has institutions, but they are weak; a failed state has institutions that no longer function or never really existed in the first place. Menkhaus (2003) makes the case that Somalia crossed the line from fragility into total collapse because of civil war, terrorism, and famine. Afghanistan, on the other hand, received external support for years, which created an illusion of stability until the occupation ended.

Critiques of the concept argue that failure is sometimes more about Western interpretation than the actual reality on the ground. The label 'failed state' can be politicized, used to justify intervention or to shape global policy (Call, 2008). This critique suggests that we should be careful in applying rigid categories, because failure can mean different things depending on the context. Still, the empirical and juridical models give us a foundation to work with, even if they are not perfect.

Somalia's Path to State Failure

Somalia is a state which has never been able to escape fragility or a state of failure. Its history is plagued by colonization and the results of post-colonialism. The British colonised Somalia for its natural resources, and when it was stripped clean of resources, they left little to the state to realize self-reliance, leading to civil war (Lewis, 2002). Because of interstate war, several factors came to light: home-grown terrorism, piracy, corruption, and human rights violations, resulting in Somalia experiencing several national crises within its borders, including humanitarian crises — health collapse and national famine (Hastings, 2009). The results were an internal conflict between juridical and empirical statehood. Somalia has always held this paradox — recognition as a juridical state, but failure as an empirical state because of a lack of effective governance (Krasner, 2004).

What separates Somalia from Afghanistan is the nature of its collapse. Afghanistan's failure was shaped by a single dominant force — The Taliban — consolidating power, whereas Somalia fragmented in the opposite direction, with no single authority able to claim control.

Collapse of Central Government, Clan Politics, and Persistent Weak Governance

Multiple failed attempts at rebuilding within Somalia have led to a continuance of weak governance and have left the state in a precarious situation where there is a battle between juridical recognition as a state and its empirical inability to effectively exercise authority across its territory. If we are to believe Weber's theory of monopoly of violence (Weber, 1946), Somalia fails in that regard, as the violence comes from all angles and not necessarily from state actors or only one rebel group. The dysfunction from rebel groups does not produce a better-functioning state for the purposes of state security, but rather competing demands of individual security interests and entrenched corruption. Therefore, Rotberg's framework of a public-goods failure applies, as Somalia is not able to provide basic necessities to its people (Rotberg, 2004).

Although the current federal government of Somalia has United Nations backing, the discrepancies limit Somalia's path to sovereignty and recognition of complete statehood. Somalia continues to be a fragile state, and even with United Nations and United States intervention, the likelihood of a stronger state eludes Somalia (Menkhaus, 2003). Somalia lacks a monopoly of violence (Weber, 1946), with clan militias and al-Shabaab exercising force independently of the state.

During COVID-19, Somalia could not protect its citizens and could not provide vaccines or manage the response, which led to some of the highest death rates in the whole of Africa. Amnesty International reported a number of 798 official deaths but recognized that the number is likely to be higher because of

the breakdown in the healthcare system (Amnesty International, 2021). In 2011, Somalia faced its largest famine, calling on the international community to provide care packages throughout the territory (Hillbruner and Moloney, 2012).

Securitization of Somalia

The international community's engagement with Somalia has been shaped not only by humanitarian concern but by the securitization of Somalia as a source of existential threat to regional and global stability. From the early 2000s onward, the reframing of Somalia's internal collapse as an international security problem — centred on the twin threats of al-Shabaab's alleged links to al-Qaeda and the proliferation of piracy in the Gulf of Aden — provided the political architecture for successive foreign interventions that exceeded the bounds of institutional reconstruction. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and the sustained involvement of United States special operations forces were justified through this security framing rather than through a coherent strategy for building the sovereign institutional capacity that might have ended Somalia's dependence on external actors. As Buzan, Weaver, and de Wilde (1998) argue, securitization moves construct threats in ways that justify extraordinary measures — measures that, in Somalia's case, consistently prioritised the containment of security spillovers over the development of domestic governance. Call's (2008) critique of the failed state label is directly applicable here: Somalia was constructed as a threat to be managed rather than a state to be rebuilt, and the interventions that followed reflected that construction.

Human Security Collapse in Somalia

The consequences of Somalia's state failure are not confined to the institutional level. They are inscribed on the bodies and lives of the populations living within the vacuum that collapsed statehood creates. Personal security has been systematically violated through arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killing carried out by al-Shabaab, clan militias, and in documented cases by forces operating under the nominal authority of the federal government itself (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Political security has been absent for journalists, who face targeted assassination and intimidation, making Somalia consistently one of the most dangerous countries in Africa for press freedom (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). Community security has been catastrophically undermined for multiple marginalised populations: same-sex conduct is criminalised under both Somali federal law and al-Shabaab's enforcement of sharia, with penalties ranging from imprisonment to death, while women continue to face systematic exclusion from political participation and economic life. These violations are not incidental to state failure — they are constitutive of it. They reflect precisely the condition Rotberg (2004) identifies as the terminal stage of state collapse: the point at which the state no longer provides personal security, the rule of law, or political participation to any meaningful portion of its population.

Afghanistan's Path to State Failure

Historical Background and Foreign Involvement

Before the United States occupation, there was the Soviet Union. The Cold War rivalry made Afghanistan a geopolitical battleground, culminating in the Soviet invasion of 1979. In response, the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia channelled funding and weapons to the Mujahideen, thus embedding Afghanistan within a proxy war. This proxy war led to the emergence of the Taliban as a governing authority and ultimately to the contentious politics of Afghanistan (Ahmad, 2018). By the early 2000s, the United States started its ground war in Afghanistan as a response to 9/11 and as part of the war on terror;

however, the United States continued its occupation over the next two decades in the name of freedom for Afghan women, where the claim was made in the name of human rights (Rogers, 2008).

The Taliban, Terrorism, and Parallel Authority

In the case of Afghanistan, the paradox is quite apparent: the Taliban, while an internationally designated terrorist group, also acted and currently acts as the de facto government, engaging in policy, economics, social programs, security, education, and the rule of law, exercising control in a way that suggests a formal form of governance. Despite functioning as a governing authority, the Taliban's actions have led to the delegitimization of statehood due to their designation as a terrorist organization. As Faheem and Minhas (2022) note, the international community is faced with the question of whether to grant recognition to their government or not.

This is where Afghanistan presents a direct challenge to Weber's framework. The Taliban satisfies the empirical dimension of statehood — they hold the monopoly of violence within the territory — yet because they carry an international designation as a terrorist organization, that monopoly is not recognized as legitimate by the broader community of states. Afghanistan therefore occupies a paradoxical position in which the de facto holders of coercive force meet one dimension of Weber's definition while failing another. This suggests that Weber's model alone cannot fully account for cases in which legitimacy and effective control are held by different actors.

Securitization and the Conditions of Taliban Resurgence

The international response to Afghanistan's trajectory of state fragility cannot be understood outside the framework of securitization. The United States' declaration of war in October 2001 was constructed explicitly as a response to an existential threat — the post-9/11 framing of terrorism as an attack not merely on American lives but on the American way of life constituted a securitization move in the precise sense that Buzan, Weaver, and de Wilde (1998) describe: a speech act that elevated a security issue beyond the bounds of normal political process and justified extraordinary measures in response. The initial military campaign achieved its most visible objective rapidly — the Taliban were driven from Kabul in November 2001 and lost control of their principal urban strongholds within weeks, representing the most significant degradation of their power since the movement's emergence in the mid-1990s. Had the intervention been confined to its Article 51 self-defence mandate and followed immediately by a genuine programme of Afghan-led institutional reconstruction, the trajectory of state failure might have been different. Instead, the occupation expanded in scope and duration precisely as its original justification weakened. Rather than filling the institutional vacuum left by the Taliban's displacement with legitimate, domestically rooted governance structures, the United States and its allies constructed an externally designed state apparatus dependent on foreign funding, foreign security guarantees, and foreign political legitimacy — institutions that bore the formal appearance of statehood without its organic foundations.

It was within this vacuum, and against this backdrop of externally imposed and internally fragile governance, that the Taliban began their reconstitution. Operating from sanctuary in Pakistan's border regions through the mid-2000s, rebuilding recruitment networks and financing structures, they launched a sustained insurgency in southern Afghanistan by 2006 that the occupation's security apparatus proved incapable of suppressing. By 2010 they exercised effective control over significant rural territories; by 2021 they retook Kabul within days of the US withdrawal — a speed that laid bare the complete absence of indigenous institutional legitimacy in the state the occupation had spent two decades constructing. As the years passed and the immediate threat was demonstrably degraded — culminating in the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 — the original securitization justification was exhausted without the occupation

ending. What followed was a second, distinct securitization moves: the reframing of the continued presence as a mission to protect Afghan women's rights and to defend human rights against Taliban governance. This secondary securitization construction served to extend a military presence whose strategic rationale had collapsed. The Taliban's return to full governmental authority in 2021 was not an interruption of the occupation's project — it was its logical conclusion. As Call (2008) argues, in Afghanistan, the construction of the state as both a terror threat and a site of gender oppression performed precisely that function across two successive decades, while the population it claimed to protect bore the consequences.

Impact of the US Occupation and International Intervention

The impact of the United States occupation within Afghanistan was a fast-growing movement of Islamic extremism, more so because of the United States presence. Pape argues that military occupation — not extremist ideology — leads to suicide terrorism (Pape, 2003). The prolonged foreign military presence fuelled widespread resentment that, as Pape (2003) documents, contributed to increased local support for radical movements and strengthened the Taliban's recruitment base.

There was an institutional breakdown of the Afghan state; the banking crisis, the economic and monetary sanctions against the Taliban, and many other developments over recent years have caused a total collapse of the Afghan economy, driving millions of people into poverty and causing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis (Sharif, 2022). The 2021 collapse therefore illustrates that prolonged international intervention can entrench fragility rather than resolve state failure.

Human Security Collapse in Afghanistan`

Beneath the institutional collapse that the 2021 withdrawal made visible lies a human security crisis of comparable severity to that documented in Somalia, though taking a distinctly different form. Where Somalia's human security failures are diffuse — distributed across multiple non-state actors operating in a fragmented landscape of competing authorities — Afghanistan's are concentrated and systematic, the product of a single governing authority exercising a monopoly of violence in ways that are deliberately and comprehensively targeted at specific populations. Under Taliban governance, personal security has been violated through arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and the extrajudicial killing of former government officials, military personnel, and civil society actors (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Political security has been eliminated through the systematic suppression of freedom of expression — independent media has been largely dismantled, journalists face imprisonment and assassination, and public protest is met with lethal force. Community security has collapsed for multiple categories of person: same-sex conduct is criminalised and punishable by death under the Taliban's interpretation and enforcement of sharia; women have been progressively erased from public life through successive decrees banning education, employment, and freedom of movement; and ethnic and religious minorities face targeted persecution. These violations are the deliberate instruments of a governing authority that has captured the monopoly of violence and deployed it against its own population. Measured against the UNDP's (1994) human security framework, Afghanistan fails across every dimension simultaneously, revealing the full cost of an international intervention strategy that prioritised the construction of juridical statehood over the protection of the human beings living within it.

Results and Discussion

The Empirical-Juridical Paradox

Somalia and Afghanistan represent two distinct expressions of the same fundamental paradox: both states

have retained juridical recognition by the international community while failing, repeatedly and demonstrably, to satisfy the empirical conditions that statehood requires. Krasner's (2004) distinction between international legal sovereignty and domestic sovereignty provides the analytical lens through which this paradox is most clearly visible, but the cases differ in the form the paradox takes and in the consequences it produces.

In Somalia, the paradox is one of sustained absence. The state has held UN recognition continuously since independence, yet for significant periods it has exercised no meaningful authority over its territory, controlled no unified security force, and delivered no consistent public goods to its population. The juridical shell of Somali statehood has persisted precisely because the international system has no institutional mechanism for revoking recognition once granted — and because the geopolitical costs of formally acknowledging Somalia's empirical non-existence as a state have consistently outweighed the political will to do so. The result, as Schwarz and Corral (2011) observe, is a form of recognition that exists in name only.

In Afghanistan, the paradox takes a different and more acute form. Afghanistan does not merely lack empirical function — it possesses a de facto governing authority that satisfies many of the empirical conditions of statehood while being legally and politically ineligible for the international recognition that would complete it. The Taliban exercise territorial control, maintain a monopoly of coercive force, deliver a form of security, and administer a system of law — yet their international designation as a terrorist organisation means that the empirical and juridical dimensions of sovereignty are held by entirely different actors. This split produces a condition that Krasner's framework identifies but cannot resolve — a state whose recognition actively prevents the international community from engaging with the entity that actually governs it.

Taken together, the two cases reveal a structural flaw in the international system's approach to statehood: juridical recognition, once granted, becomes self-perpetuating regardless of empirical reality, and the gap between recognition and function becomes the space in which state failure is sustained rather than resolved.

Securitization of Intervention

If the empirical-juridical paradox describes the condition of both states, securitization theory explains the mechanism through which the international community responded to that condition — and deepened it. In both Somalia and Afghanistan, external intervention was justified through the construction of security threats that exceeded the legal framework governing the use of force, producing interventions that prioritised the management of security spillovers over the development of the domestic institutional capacity that might have ended state failure.

In Afghanistan, securitization operated in two successive phases. The post-9/11 construction of terrorism as an existential threat to the United States provided the initial justification for military intervention under a broadly interpreted Article 51 self-defence mandate. As that justification degraded — most visibly with the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 — a second securitization move substituted a humanitarian framing, constructing Afghan women's rights and human rights more broadly as international security concerns requiring continued military presence. Both moves served the same function: to extend and legitimise an intervention that could not be sustained under the narrow legal conditions Article 51 establishes. Meanwhile, the Taliban reconstituted themselves precisely within the vacuum that externally imposed governance could not fill, returning to full power in 2021 not despite the occupation but in significant measure because of it.

In Somalia, securitization operated through a different institutional mechanism but produced structurally similar outcomes. The framing of Somalia as a source of piracy, terrorism, and humanitarian catastrophe threatening regional and global stability provided the basis for successive Chapter VII interventions that were designed to manage the threat Somalia was constructed as posing to external interests rather than to address the structural conditions producing state failure from within. As Call (2008) anticipated, the construction of Somalia as a failed state threat has justified continuous external engagement while simultaneously foreclosing the space for the indigenous institutional development that genuine state reconstruction would require.

The comparison reveals a critical distinction with significant policy implications: unilateral securitization, as in Afghanistan, produces interventions that are legally contestable and strategically incoherent; multilateral securitization through UN authorisation, as in Somalia, produces interventions that are legally compliant but institutionally counterproductive. Neither form of securitization-driven intervention has produced sustainable statehood. The common variable is not the legal mechanism but the underlying logic — the prioritisation of external security interests over internal institutional development.

Monopoly of Violence

Weber's concept of the monopoly of legitimate violence provides the most immediate diagnostic tool for comparing the two cases, and the comparison reveals not merely that both states have failed by this measure but that they have failed in structurally opposite ways — a distinction that has profound implications for understanding what kind of intervention, if any, might be capable of reversing failure in each case.

In Afghanistan, the monopoly of violence has been consolidated — but consolidated by an actor whose claim to legitimacy the international community refuses to recognise. The Taliban's seizure of Kabul in August 2021 represented not the fragmentation of coercive authority but its reconcentration under a single governing entity that now exercises effective control over the entirety of Afghan territory. By the strict Weberian measure, the Taliban satisfy the empirical condition of statehood — they hold the monopoly of violence — yet the legitimacy dimension of Weber's definition remains contested. Afghanistan's failure is not the absence of a monopoly of violence but the capture of that monopoly by an authority whose governance model is built on the systematic violation of the human security of the population it controls.

In Somalia, the monopoly of violence has fragmented rather than consolidated. No single actor — not the federally recognised government, not al-Shabaab, not the clan militias operating across different regions — has succeeded in establishing the kind of territorial and coercive dominance that the Weberian state requires. Rotberg's (2004) public-goods framework captures this condition precisely — Somalia is not merely a state that has lost its monopoly of violence but a state in which the preconditions for reconstructing that monopoly have been systematically eroded by decades of fragmentation, external dependency, and the absence of a unifying political authority.

The contrast between consolidated and fragmented failure is analytically significant because it suggests that the two cases require fundamentally different responses. Afghanistan's problem is not the absence of institutional authority but the character of the authority that exists — the challenge is one of legitimacy and recognition rather than of institutional construction from scratch. Somalia's problem is the opposite — the challenge is not to delegitimise an existing authority but to construct one where none currently exists at the national level.

Human Security Collapse

The empirical-juridical paradox, the securitization of intervention, and the fragmentation or capture of the

monopoly of violence are structural and institutional phenomena. Human security collapse describes what has happened to people — and it is the dimension of state failure that the dominant theoretical frameworks most systematically obscure. Measured against the UNDP's (1994) seven dimensions of human security, both Somalia and Afghanistan register catastrophic and sustained failure, though the patterns of violation differ in ways that reflect the structural distinction between consolidated and fragmented failure identified in Theme 3.

Across the dimension of personal security, both cases document systematic violation, but by different actors and through different mechanisms. In Afghanistan, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killing have been carried out by a single consolidated authority — the Taliban — governing through the deliberate deployment of fear and coercive control against defined categories of person (Human Rights Watch, 2022). In Somalia, personal security has been violated across a fragmented landscape of perpetrators — al-Shabaab, clan militias, and even forces nominally operating under the federal government. The distinction matters analytically: Afghanistan's personal security crisis is the product of a governing authority using violence as an instrument of political control; Somalia's is the product of the absence of any authority capable of protecting its population from violence at all.

Across the dimension of political security, both cases are equally catastrophic. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have dismantled independent media, imprisoned and killed journalists, and eliminated the conditions for any form of political expression or organised opposition. In Somalia, journalists face assassination, arbitrary detention, and harassment from al-Shabaab, clan actors, and in documented cases from government-aligned forces, making Somalia consistently one of the most dangerous countries in the world for press freedom (Reporters Without Borders, 2023).

Across the dimension of community security, both cases document violations that expose the full human cost of state failure. In Afghanistan, same-sex conduct is criminalised and punishable by death under Taliban governance; women have been erased from public life; and ethnic and religious minorities face targeted persecution. In Somalia, same-sex conduct is similarly criminalised under both federal law and al-Shabaab's enforcement of sharia; women face systematic exclusion from political and economic participation; and minority clan groups occupy the most vulnerable position in a social order structured around clan-based access to resources. These violations are what state failure means for the people living inside it, and any scholarly or policy framework that abstracts state failure to the institutional level without accounting for these human dimensions is analytically incomplete and ethically inadequate.

The comparative analysis also reveals a shared pattern that transcends the structural differences between the two cases: in both Somalia and Afghanistan, the populations most vulnerable to persecution are those already marginalised by existing hierarchies of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and political affiliation. State failure does not create these hierarchies — it removes the institutional constraints that might otherwise limit their most violent expressions.

Policy Implications — Toward an Intervention Doctrine Grounded in Human Security and International Law

The comparative analysis developed across Themes 1 through 4 generates policy implications that are specific, evidence-grounded, and directly derived from the findings. Three overarching conclusions emerge.

First, intervention must be legally bounded and institutionally purposeful. The analysis of both cases demonstrates that interventions exceeding the narrow self-defence mandate of Article 51 or justified through securitization moves that serve geopolitical rather than institutional interests, consistently deepen

rather than resolve state failure. External actors should be prohibited from using the failed state designation as a basis for open-ended military intervention, and any engagement beyond the strict Article 51 threshold should be conditioned on a demonstrable and time-bounded institutional development mandate. The UN Security Council's Chapter VII authorisation mechanism requires reform to incorporate human security benchmarks as conditions of continued authorisation.

Second, the structural distinction between consolidated and fragmented failure demands case-specific responses rather than universal templates. Afghanistan's challenge is the question of how the international community engages with a governing authority it has designated as a terrorist organisation while the population living under that authority faces systematic human security violations. Conditional engagement — calibrated sanctions relief, targeted recognition mechanisms, and diplomatic channels contingent on measurable human security improvements including the restoration of women's right to education and employment, the cessation of arbitrary detention, and the decriminalisation of sexual identity — offers a more defensible framework than either full recognition or continued isolation. Somalia's challenge requires the integration of indigenous governance structures, including clan-based dispute resolution and resource allocation mechanisms, into a formal state apparatus that builds legitimacy from the ground up. Regional organisations with genuine cultural and political proximity — the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development — are better positioned than Western-led coalitions to facilitate this process (Rogers, 2008; Schwarz and Corral, 2011).

Third, and most fundamentally, the measure of success in responding to state failure must be recalibrated from the restoration of juridical statehood to the improvement of human security outcomes. A human security framework, anchored in the UNDP's (1994) seven dimensions and operationalised through measurable benchmarks, would reorient international engagement toward the outcomes that actually matter: freedom from arbitrary detention, freedom of expression and political participation, protection of marginalised communities from persecution on the basis of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and political affiliation, and access to the economic and social public goods that Rotberg (2004) identifies as the substantive content of functional statehood.

The policy recommendations advanced above share a common precondition that the current international institutional framework is structurally incapable of delivering: accountability. The violations documented in this paper have recurred across decades not because the international community lacks the normative frameworks to prevent them but because those frameworks carry no meaningful enforcement mechanism. Article 2(4) prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity of states; it does not bind the states most capable of violating it to any consequence for doing so. Chapter VII authorisations impose no human security benchmarks and no accountability for outcomes. The gap between international law as written and international law as enforced is the structural condition that makes the pattern of failure documented in this paper not merely possible but repeatable and self-reinforcing.

This structural condition is most acutely concentrated in the UN Security Council's veto architecture. The five permanent members — the states with the greatest capacity to construct and execute securitization-driven interventions — are simultaneously the states with the power to block any institutional challenge to those interventions. The result is a negative feedback loop of considerable analytical and policy significance: P5 members securitize threats to justify intervention; the Security Council cannot challenge those interventions because the intervening state holds veto power; intervention deepens state failure and human security collapse; the resulting instability is re-securitized as a new or continuing threat requiring sustained engagement; and the cycle repeats, shielded at every turn from accountability by the same veto

structure that enabled it. Somalia and Afghanistan are not anomalies within this system — they are its most thoroughly documented expressions. The loop also generates a second failure: in states where P5 members hold no strategic interest, the same veto structure produces systematic under-intervention — too much engagement where geopolitical interests exist, too little where human security crises are equally severe but offer no strategic return. Addressing this structural failure requires reforms that distribute Security Council decision-making authority beyond the concentration of veto power in five states. The proposals already in the scholarly and policy literature — voluntary veto restraint codes for mass atrocity situations, qualified majority override mechanisms, mandatory veto justification requirements, and the development of a human security authorisation framework operating outside the P5 veto structure (Weiss, 2003; Hurd, 2007; UN Secretary-General, 2021) — represent the minimum institutional architecture necessary to break the feedback loop this paper has documented. Without structural reform of the enforcement architecture, the normative recommendations of this and every comparable study will remain aspirational rather than actionable — and the lessons of Somalia and Afghanistan will continue to go unlearned.

Conclusions

The central finding of this paper is that external intervention, as practised in both Somalia and Afghanistan, has not been incidental to state failure — it has been constitutive of it. The two cases examined here are not failures of an otherwise sound international framework for responding to state collapse; they are its most thoroughly documented expressions. In both cases, interventions constructed through securitization moves that exceeded or distorted the legal framework governing the use of force produced the same outcome: the destruction or prevention of the indigenous institutional development that genuine statehood requires, the entrenchment of dependency on external actors whose withdrawal guaranteed collapse, and the systematic subordination of human security to geopolitical interest. The lesson of Somalia and Afghanistan, stated plainly, is that the international community has consistently prioritised the management of the threats that failing states pose to external actors over the development of the conditions that might allow those states to sustain themselves. Until that priority is reversed — structurally, institutionally, and legally — the cycle will continue.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that Somalia and Afghanistan represent two structurally distinct expressions of the same underlying failure. Somalia's collapse is one of fragmentation — the absence of any authority capable of consolidating the monopoly of violence, delivering public goods, or projecting legitimate governance across its territory — driven by colonial extraction, the systematic destruction of indigenous institutional capacity, and successive external interventions that managed security spillovers without addressing their causes. Afghanistan's collapse is one of capture — the consolidation of coercive authority by an actor structurally ineligible for international recognition, produced by decades of occupation that constructed the appearance of statehood without its organic foundations and whose withdrawal guaranteed the reassertion of the only authority that had retained genuine domestic legitimacy throughout. These are not the same problem. They do not require the same response.

The securitization framework applied in this analysis reveals the mechanism through which these failures were produced and sustained. In Afghanistan, successive securitization moves extended a foreign presence whose strategic rationale had collapsed while the Taliban reconstituted themselves within the institutional vacuum that presence could not fill. In Somalia, multilateral securitization through UN Chapter VII authorisation produced interventions that were legally compliant but institutionally counterproductive.

The comparison reveals that the legal mechanism of intervention is less significant than its underlying logic: whether it prioritises the containment of external threats or the development of internal institutional capacity. In both cases examined here, it prioritised the former.

The human security analysis makes visible what the dominant theoretical frameworks consistently obscure: the human beings living inside state failure. Arbitrary detention, the systematic suppression of political expression, the criminalisation of sexual identity, the erasure of women from public life, the targeting of journalists, the denial of access to healthcare, education, and economic participation — these are the substantive content of state failure as experienced by the populations the international community claims to protect. The measure of success in responding to state failure must be recalibrated from the restoration of juridical statehood to the measurable improvement of human security outcomes across the UNDP's dimensions of personal, political, and community security.

The enforcement gap identified in the policy analysis is the structural precondition for all the failures this paper documents. The UN Security Council's veto architecture concentrates decision-making authority in the five states most capable of constructing and executing securitization-driven interventions — and most able to block institutional accountability for their consequences. The negative feedback loop this produces is self-reinforcing and well-evidenced: securitization justifies intervention, veto power shields intervention from challenge, intervention deepens failure, failure is re-securitized, and the cycle repeats. Breaking this loop requires structural reform of the enforcement architecture — veto restraint mechanisms, human security benchmarks as conditions of Chapter VII authorisation, and the distribution of Security Council decision-making authority beyond the concentration that currently compromises its capacity to act on genuine human security grounds.

Somalia and Afghanistan have been studied, intervened in, abandoned, and studied again for decades. What this paper has argued is that the lessons available from both cases have not been learned — not because they are obscure but because learning them would require the international community to confront the structural conditions that make its own behaviour a primary cause of the outcomes it claims to be addressing. The empirical-juridical paradox, the securitization of intervention, the capture or fragmentation of the monopoly of violence, the collapse of human security, and the enforcement gap that sustains them all — these are not separate problems. They are interlocking dimensions of a single systemic failure. Addressing state failure therefore requires not better intentions but structural change: legal accountability for interventions that exceed their mandates, institutional reform of the bodies that authorise them, and a fundamental reorientation of the measure of success from the production of juridical states to the protection of the human beings living within them. That is the lesson of Somalia and Afghanistan. It remains, as yet, unlearned.

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