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COLLAPSED STATE IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The problem of failed or failing states in our current international system is like the uninvited guest at a party: the overwhelming impulse is to ignore it, to treat it as insignificant, and to hope it will go away – Susan L. Woodward.

Abstract

Standing at the threshold of the 21st century, it is difficult for many to conceive of collapsed states i.e., states losing sovereignty and control over its territory, so long organised around the order as envisaged in the Westphalian state system. The phenomenon, therefore, is a new one in the domain of international relations with many of its facets. While it is true that 'weak state syndrome' as is the case with the majority of the Third World states, is a precursor to collapsed states, the fact remains that Third World polity is still living with this reality and that many weak states are still surviving. The paper argues that, while the characteristics of collapsed states are similar, their paths towards 'state failure' are different. This is because each state encounters different problems and trigger mechanisms in the long trajectory towards its decay and collapse. Empirical study, examination, therefore, finds prominence in the article followed by certain theoretical reflections on the

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concept. Given the fact that weakness caused by failure in state building is the starting point in the trajectory of state collapse, a comprehensive state building in political, economic and social terms is the preventive strategy to salvage a number of Third World weak, fragile and vulnerable states from plunging into any future decay and collapse.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of collapsed state has entered the lexicon of international relations in recent times.² However, the phenomenon is not as new as it is believed to be. It is, in fact, a new and different manifestation of the problems that the majority of Third World weak states have, since long, been facing in their state-building process. The concept, therefore, may be said to have few historical antecedents in international affairs.

Given the relative infancy of research on the subject, the concept of collapsed state has been invested with divergent meanings and conceptions, the result being that, in strict theoretical sense, there is no single understanding on it. This has, in turn, made the task of drawing out the conceptual parameters of a collapsed state a difficult one. However, given the fact that few countries and regions have been taken as the appropriate units for analysing the concept, a number of scholars have been able to come out with few empirical tools to study the phenomenon. This, in other words, implies that despite the current contention over the definition of the term, the process and factors leading to state collapse are still identifiable.

² The last decades of the 20th Century have experienced wholesale examples of state weakness, especially in Africa. Somalia, Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi – to cite but few cases where states have ceased for at least a time to function as states – are examples of collapsing or collapsed states.

It should be borne in mind that state collapse is not a sudden crisis marked by warnings, *coup d'état*, riot, civil strife or any type of violence. It, rather, involves a long-term process of state disintegration and decay. The starting point in the trajectory towards state collapse is the general political, economic and social weaknesses of a number of Third World countries. In this connection, it is interesting to note that while the collapsed states share few common characteristics, their routes towards failure, decay or disintegration are different, each experiencing or witnessing different mechanisms on the way. Taking due note of the long process during which a state fails or collapses due to different trigger mechanisms, analysts and observers find themselves at liberty to characterise, quite staggeringly, many states as collapsed states or failed states, thus deviating a slight from the original sense in which the concept is understood. It would, thus, be an error to call a particular state a failed state or a collapsed state because of its fragile and beleaguered democratic institutions, misgovernance, human rights violations, economic malfunctioning etc. These are some of the symptoms that may accentuate the process of state collapse rather than directly qualify a state as already a failed or collapsed one.

Against the above backdrop, the article purports to study the process and the stages of state collapse and their politico-strategic, social and economic implications for the present day world. The research burden of the paper lies in identifying the factors that generate the likelihood of state collapse and in determining their relative importance. It also suggests a few measures for resuscitating a state sliding towards decay. Towards this end, the article is divided into four sections. Section I of the paper reviews the concept and theoretical discussion on the phenomenon of collapsed states. Section II examines a number of so-called collapsed or near-collapsed states to identify the trajectories, these states have been marking. Section III assesses the empirical findings, while Section

IV offers few ideas and suggestions for reversing the process of state decay in so far as many Third World states till today remain vulnerable to such phenomenon.

SECTION I

COLLAPSED STATE: THEORETICAL PARAMETERS

Empirical analysis would allow us to view state collapse, in most generic sense, as 'state disintegration'. In other words, a state is said to have collapsed or disintegrated when it no longer performs the functions generally required of a state. The case study undertaken in the paper well establishes certain indicators to show how certain weaknesses generate the likelihood of state collapse and on what time scale. Interestingly, the literature on the subject shows how different authors have baptised the phenomenon of state disintegration by using different terminology. It has been identified by William Zartman as '*state collapse*' (1995), by Caroline Thomas, Joel Migdal and Barry Buzan as '*weak states*' (1989, 1988 and 1983), by Mazuri as '*failed states*' (1995), by Amin Saikal as '*disruptive state*' (2000) and by Robert H. Jackson as '*quasi state*' (1990).³ Despite the difference in nomenclature, all such concepts, to varying degrees, tend to examine the state, its capability in discharging the functions designed for it, and its ability to control the territory within which it is situated.

Among the above, the concept of state collapse as used by Zartman seems to be the most popularly accepted one. He defines the concept in the light of his knowledge gained after an exhaustive

³ For details see, William Zartman (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Boulder Co., Lynne Rienner, 1995. Caroline Thomas and Paikiashothy Saravnamuttu (ed.), *The State and Instability in the South*, St. Martins, New York, 1989, Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1988, Amin Saikal, "Dimensions of State Disruption and International Responses", *Third World Quarterly*, 21, January 2000, pp. 39-49.

examination of a number of cases of state failure in the continent of Africa. Zartman uses state collapse to describe 'a situation where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new'.⁴ Various definitions have been furnished reflecting the similar views as espoused by Zartman, excepting that many authors have preferred to use the term 'failed state' rather than a 'collapsed state' in the similar situation. As a result, there is the tendency to use these two terms interchangeably without distorting the principal idea of the concept or creating any semantic confusion around it.

Thus to Daniel Thurer, 'failed states are states in which institutions and law and order have totally or partially collapsed under the pressure and amidst the confusion of erupting violence, yet which subsist as a ghostly presence on the world map'.⁵ Preece describes failed states as states that 'are internationally recognised as sovereign territories, but which are nevertheless incapable of providing those domestic conditions of peace, order and good governance traditionally associated with political independence'.⁶ The former Secretary-General of the UN, Boutros Boutros-Ghali observes the phenomenon in the context of anarchic forms of internal violence and says, "a feature of such conflicts is the collapse of state institutions, especially the police and judiciary, with resulting paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos. Not only are the functions of a government suspended, but also its assets are looted and experienced officials are killed or have fled the country. This is rarely the case in inter-state

⁴ William Zartman, *op .cit.* p. 1.

⁵ Daniel Thurer, "The 'failed State' and International Law"

<http://www.icrc/irceng.nsf/4dc394db5b54f3fa41256739002412f/2f/312f4b1513b68af041256871002ae39b?Open Document>, p. 2.

⁶ Cited in Robert H. Dorff, "Responding to the Failed State: What to Do and What to Expect", <http://www.ippu.purdue.edu/conference/Dorffms.html>, p. 2.

wars. It means that international intervention must extend beyond military and humanitarian tasks and must include the promotion of international reconciliation and the re-establishment of effective government".⁷ The definition offered by Helman and Ratner describes the failed nation-state as 'utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community'.⁸

All the definitions furnished above enable one to identify the essential characteristics of a collapsed state without vagueness and inconsistency. They also conform to what has been observed in our empirical study. The characteristics, in essence, are the theoretical elements or tools that the analysts use in their comprehensive study of the phenomenon of a collapsed state. *Firstly*, there is the political element i.e., the internal collapse of the core government. This, in other words, implies that all the structures of the government responsible for guaranteeing law and order (police, judiciary and other bodies) either cease to exist or are no longer able to operate. The monopoly of power that a state enjoys is, therefore, destroyed and the society reverts to what may be called 'the rule of the jungle'. This kind of situation amounts to what Daniel Thurer calls a *privatisation* of the state or indeed to its *criminalisation*. Paradoxically, the forces that are to maintain peace and order in the state involve themselves in looting, killing, drug dealing, arms trafficking and all other sorts of law breaking activities. As Robert H. Dorff remarks, "Humanitarian crises, such as starvation and mass refugee movements are common. Increasing criminality and widespread corruption frequently appear in all aspects of society, including political and economic institutions. And the formal economy is often non-existent, having given way to a burgeoning informal economy characterised by black markets, extortion, and

⁷ Cited in Daniel Thurer, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁸ Cited in Robert H. Dorff, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

widespread criminal activity. In sum, the country is subject to the entire range of 'gray area phenomena'. With the steady erosion and at times complete absence of legitimate governance, the challenge becomes one of 'governing the ungovernable' and, failing that, managing the consequences of that ungovernability for national, regional, and international security".⁹ Congo is an example where the law enforcing militias disintegrated into armed gangs of looters and the army set up their own units to use state owned resources for enrichment. *Secondly*, the phenomenon of state collapse is to be understood within the exclusive territorial context of the state in question. This implies that a complex mix of political, economic and social factors that lead to the collapse of state is internal in nature. Some exogenous factors intervene only to make the political, economic and social non-sustainability of the state worse. This, however, does not overlook the fact that a state collapse has its eventual impacts on cross-border peace and stability as well. As has been observed in case of Rwanda, the exogenous factors played a role in further intensifying the conflict between the two ethnic groups – Tutsi and Hutu. *Thirdly*, there is the functional aspect of state collapse, i.e., the absence of bodies capable of representing the state at the levels, domestic, regional and international. In the circumstances, either no institution exists with authority to negotiate, represent and enforce, or even if it does, it is totally ineffective, unreliable and act as 'statesman by day and bandit by night'.¹⁰ The total failure in state governance marked by the loss of legitimacy and control of power by the state authority leads to a serious internal crisis marked by civil and communal violence, rampant killings, arsons, rape, pillage and all sorts of egregious violations of human

⁹ Robert H. Dorff, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Daniel Thurer, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

rights.¹¹ Finally, from a legal point of view, a collapsed state is incapable of representing itself in the international community as no institution exists with authority to negotiate, represent or enforce the state's decision. In other words, there is no body, which can commit the state in an effective and legally binding way, for example by concluding an agreement.

Sliding toward Decay and Collapse – A Creeping Process

The above definitions of collapsed state and its characteristics obviously bring home the point that such states pose a challenge to the order organised around the Westphalian state system, in which the basic element of statehood, i.e., the norm of sovereignty, guides its behaviour. The loss of sovereign capacity as observed in case of the failed states is, in effect, percolated through a long and creeping process of state decay. In other words, the state collapse or state decay is not an overnight phenomenon. It is a long term process with a long duration dimension. The process is essentially marked by few internal and endogenous problems in political, economic and social life of a state until a point when such problems find their outlet in the form of an implosion so as to invalidate the very *raison d'être* of the state's existence. On occasions, certain exogenous factors too add themselves to various internal factors to further accelerate the process of state failure or collapse.

¹¹ "To the loss of approximately one million lives resulting from Rwanda genocide and its aftermath must now be added at least 300, 000 "unaccounted for" among those refugees who could not or did not want to go back to Rwanda, as well as thousands of Banyarwanda residents of North and South Kivu (Congo), Hutu and Tutsi, who died of hunger or disease, or at each other's hand, or fell under the blows of the rampaging Zairian soldiers or the bullets of Kabila's troops. If any credence is to be given to the report recently published by Médecins Sans Frontières accusing the AFDL (Alliance des Forces pour la Libération du Congo) of pursuing a 'deliberate strategy of elimination of all Rwandan refugees, including women and children, 'genocide is evidently not the monopoly of any single state or community. In the history of man's inhumanity to man, few chapters are as horrific as the carnage suffered by Hutu and Tutsi since 1972". René Lamarchand, *op.cit.*, pp. 2-3.

The problems, internal in nature, are the result of state's malfunctioning in certain important spheres. In this connection, it is important to bear in mind that state collapse is basically linked up with the question of functions that a state is supposed to discharge. As a territorially defined political unit, exercising ultimate internal authority and recognising no legitimate external authority over it, a state is probably the most recognised and revered of the political institutions that the world community knows.¹² The state understood to be an authoritative institution with sovereignty over a recognised territory is as well a utilitarian political organisation to meet economic, social and security needs of its citizens. Finally, a state acts as the symbol of social cohesion where differences between class, ethnic groups, elite and various interest groups are managed by its legitimate authority in the greater interest of the nation. However, the delegation of stated functions to states had been a routine, symbolic and stereo-type distribution of works justified by their sovereign status. To what extent a state would succeed in performing these functions depended much on how it 'could build itself', in other words, its success in *state making* or *state building*.

It is not the purpose of the paper to go into a detailed discussion on the subject of state building, dealt with in details by the scholars and researchers, in particular, with respect to state building in the Third World. Suffice it to cite here a good working definition furnished by Keith Jagers and certain activities that Mohammed Ayoob envisages as essential to the process. According to the former, 'Conceptually, state building can be usefully defined as a state's ability to accumulate power. State building is the process by which the state not only grows in economic productivity and government coercion but, also, in political and institutional power. More precisely, in the power of state elites to overcome

¹² John T. Rourke, *International Politics on the World Stage*, 6th Edition, Dushkin/McGraw Hill, 1997, p. 199.

environmental, social, and political forces which stand in the way of their policy objectives. Given these requirements, I view state power to have three distinct faces: (a) power as national capabilities; (b) power as political capacity; and (c) power as institutional coherence.¹³ Ayoob speaks about certain activities essential to the process of state making. They are: i. the expansion and consolidation of the territorial and demographic domain under a political authority, including the imposition of order on contested territorial and demographic space (war); ii. the maintenance of order in the territory where, and over the population on whom, such order has already been imposed (policing) and iii. the extraction of resources from the territory and the population under control of the state essential to support not only the war making and policing activities undertaken by the state but also the maintenance of apparatuses of state necessary to carry on routine administration, deepen the state's penetration of society, and serve symbolic purposes (taxation).¹⁴

It needs to be mentioned that the Third World attempt at rapid state building has, from the very beginning, been an immensely difficult task. In most cases, there had been the undercurrent of 'nation-building' which needed to be suppressed in the name of state building on a belief that a process of modernization, development, mass education etc. would ultimately act as a catalyst in resolving the ethno-cultural, linguistic and religious conflicts in the society. In reality, however, state building could not pave the way for nation-building and the formidable challenge for bringing a social cohesion in the society always remained on the platter for a majority of the states. The reasons for the failure lie in the dynamics of history. The arbitrary fashion in which the imperial powers bequeathed to their

¹³ Cited in Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament : State Making, Regional Conflict and the International System*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, 1995, p. 21.

¹⁴ Mohammed Ayoob, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-23.

successor regimes territorial entities overlooked the demographic and ethnic realities of the time.¹⁵ The political boundaries as drawn cut across ethnic, tribal, religious, and linguistic ties, the result being that many new states composed of distinct and sometimes hostile ethnic groups or that a particular ethnic group found its own peoples cut off due to the new spatial arrangement. Thus, the overriding sense of nationalism that was to develop out of the womb of nation-state did not take place for the reason that most of the countries were, and still are, decidedly multiethnic or multinational. For most of these groups, it was unimaginable to surrender their ethnic or group loyalties to the state-wide loyalties or an overarching sense of national identity under the sponsorship of the state. Under the circumstances, the ideal of nation-state as the unifying force proved elusive in most of these societies. State building, therefore, had to live with this reality in most of the newly emerged Third World countries.¹⁶

Alongside the social fragmentation and the resulting absence of social cohesion, there had been little efforts for creating permanent political stability in most of the newly emerged states. If politics involves organising and governing a society through a given set of structures and institutions, then it would not probably be wrong to state that most of the Third World states, to date, have made little progress in this respect. The willingness of the Third World leaders to replace the traditional structures of power and authority in their respective societies with the new ones along the Western democratic model mostly faltered due to their narrow and parochial perception about the total relationship to be built between the 'rulers' and the

¹⁵ Robert Jackson opines, "The political map of Africa is devoid by and large of indigenous determination in its origins. All but a very few traditional political systems were subordinated or submerged by the colonialists. Decolonisation rarely resulted in their elevation ... Political Africa is an intrinsically imperial cum international construct". Cited in *Ibid*, p. 34.

¹⁶ See for details about ethnicity and its relationship to integration in Dr. B. P. Barua, "Ethnicity and Integration Crisis in the Third World", *Regional Studies*, Volume XX, No. 4, Autumn, 2002, pp. 61-71.R

'ruled'. In the perception of the new leaders (i) the democratic liberal goals of liberty, equality, participation etc., could no longer figure in the post-independence political agenda of the country as the need to consolidate the newly earned independence needed increasing centralisation and concentration of power in the hands of the leadership that acted as the vanguard of pre-independence national movements; ii. the establishment of an effective government was to be equated with the continuation of power of a particular regime or a person or of a coterie of elites based on the 'new nation rationale' and that their legitimacy was incontestable; iii. a powerful central authority was a prelude to any restoration of law and order and creation of a just economic order in any new country.¹⁷

It is, therefore, not surprising that the new ruling elite and their perception about political system based on a calculation of their own risks and gains in the 'power game' ultimately led to the emergence of many regimes of unrepresentative and authoritarian character in many parts of the Third World. In such systems, there had been no societal consensus on the locus of the decision making authority, no tangible effort to bridge the elite-mass gap, no appropriate techniques for reaching the masses at the grass root level, and finally no means by which those ruled could be empowered. By all logical conclusions, the domestic as well as the foreign policies of these authoritarian states were crafted in a manner commensurate with the self-interests of a particular ruler or the regime in power rather than with the interests of the nation or of the people. This situation, as Mohammed Ayoob observes, explains, 'the fragility of democratic experiments in much of the Third World. It also explains the ever-present fear that 'democratic waves' may be followed by social, economic, and political chaos and may be summarily reversed by military strongmen acting either in their own interests or in collusion

¹⁷ Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues*, UPL, Dhaka, 1980, pp. 1-25.

with powerful social, economic, and ethnic groups that feel their interests are threatened by the rhetoric or policies of elected governments'.¹⁸ While, on the one hand, the absence of democratic institutions like parliament, election, free press, independent judiciary, neutral civil and military bureaucracy etc., minimised the state capacity in building a viable political system, there has always been, on the other, the countervailing forces to oppose the system and bring changes in the political status quo. The generation of such forces has been facilitated, in course of time, by the process of modernisation including urbanisation, literacy, industrialisation, internal migration etc., and a growing consciousness among the general masses about political participation and social and economic justice. Therefore, in most cases, the Third World polities remained perennially surcharged with tension, mistrust and unrest between the 'rulers' and the 'ruled', thereby unleashing a process whereby the power wielders became increasingly vulnerable to the resilience, unity and uncapped political conscience of the general masses.

It should be noted that state building in economic sense also had been problematic for a vast majority of the Third World states. While the long colonial rule of direct economic exploitation derailed the evolutionary process of economic development in many colonial countries and delayed their transformation from backward to modern economies, the economic and developmental policies pursued by the new states in their post-independence period have been equally responsible for aggravating their economic malaise. Most of these countries plagued by their inherent economic weakness in terms of resources, technology, capital and technical know-how had to depend on the developed countries, most of which have been the ex-colonial countries, for aid and assistance. The resources for development which, therefore, had been limited needed proper and

¹⁸ Mohammed Ayoob, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

judicious utilisation as per a rational development programme with properly identified priorities. This, perhaps, lacked in the developmental programmes of the new states, which in most cases appeared to be not only faulty in formulation but as well uneven in nature lacking distributive justice.

The road to security, both external and internal, of the Third World states has equally remained smeared with insurmountable problems and hurdles from the very beginning. In the external realm of their security, most of the Third World countries seemed to remain in conflict with each other for reasons like border and ethnic conflicts due to faulty demarcation of national frontiers by the ex-colonial powers and territorial disputes over the exact location of resources like water, minerals, forests etc.¹⁹ Also, at the regional level, they remained vulnerable to and apprehensive about any domination by the regional hegemonic powers. To such dilemma are added the pressures and strains of the neo-colonialist policies of the ex-colonial powers and as well the fear of being subjects to superpower blackmail (political or economic) or even direct threat of military intervention in the midst of Cold War. In consequence, at the critical hour of their infant nationhood, territory and its protection figured prominently in the security calculation of the majority of states and the means adopted to reach the goal have been primarily military in nature. Paradoxically, however, threats to security in peripheral states were more often internal than external in origin. As discussed, the unrepresentative and repressive character of most of Third World states, uneven economic development, social cleavages and lack of societal consensus on fundamental national issues, environmental hazards etc. were enough to create an awareness among the newly emerged peripheral countries about their

¹⁹ See for details John Ravenhill, "The New Disorder in the Periphery" in Richard Leaver and James L. Richardson, *Charting the Post-Cold War Order*, Westview Press, Boulder, Oxford, 1993, pp.69-81.

very existence as nation-states. To employ Buzan's useful typology, the sources of insecurity in the poor and underdeveloped countries have been mostly derived from military, political, economic, societal (communal) or environmental factors. In such a situation, the depletion of economic resources from developmental heads to military heads hampered not only the socio-economic growth but as well caused a continuing social and political unrest with its negative impact on a country's security, both external and internal.

The creeping process of state decay or collapse, as discussed above, is essentially a man-made one rather than an accidental one caused by geographical, environmental or other reasons. To the extent that the leadership in most post-colonial states has been marked by failure to develop their political, social, economic, environmental systems in an effective and sustainable manner, certain conditions like disorganization, lawlessness, dislocation, decomposition, breakdowns, anarchy, regression etc. began to prevail in all such realms. In the circumstances, the fragile policies of the leaders in power were simply found incapable of constructing a stable, enduring and sustainable state systems in order to deliver few political goods to the citizens, i.e., security, education, health services, economic opportunity, environmental surveillance, a legal framework of order, judicial system, fundamental infra-structural requirements etc. As Robert I. Rothberg remarks, 'such states honoured these obligations in the breach'.²⁰ Eventually, in such polities, the pockets of dissension were many caused mainly by the aggrieved sentiment of an overall deprivation in the daily national life. Thus, 'if failed states are believed to be tense, deeply conflicted, and bitterly contested by warring factions with intense violence'²¹, then the rational explanation for such a phenomenon finds its ground

²⁰ Robert I. Rothberg, "The New Nature of Nation-State Failure", *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer, 2002, pp. 85-96.

²¹ Ibid.

in the very weak and fragile backbone of few states. The succeeding section of the paper is an endeavour to substantiate the argument.

SECTION II

WHEN DOES A STATE COLLAPSE? AN EMPIRICAL ENQUIRY

Out of the world's 191 nation-states, only a handful can now be categorized as failed or collapsed, which is the end stage of failure. Several dozen more countries are as well weak and serious candidates for failure.²² State collapse - the product of a complex web of political, economic, social and cultural factors - sees the interplay of such factors in a continuum where it is difficult to consider one in isolation in terms of its effects or contributions on/towards the final state collapse. In such a continuum, it is difficult to place the factors causing state collapse in any order of precedence. However, an important point, much substantiated by an empirical survey of certain types of state failure the post-Cold War period, is that state's weak political foundation is normally the point from where the downward sloping curve towards state collapse originates. The downward trend of the curve is facilitated by other factors as failing economic performance, birth of informal economy, rise of ethnic sub-nationalism, the emergence of warlords, intra-state class, ethnic and religious conflict etc. The role of each of these factors towards state collapse is circumstantial in nature, and it is difficult to gauge its actual weight in the final state collapse amidst the role of multiple factors.

While, in contemporary discourse on state collapse, the weak political foundation of a collapsed state is generally explained by certain indicators considered antithetical to democracy like authoritarian rule, lack of regime legitimacy, absence of good

²² Ibid.

governance and accountability, curbing of civil liberties, presence of 'low civic culture' etc., such an explanation, however, should be viewed with a certain degree of caution. Empirical evidence shows that states like Malawi, Myanmar, Pakistan, Syria and a host of others have not collapsed despite the long presence of autocratic rules and bad governance in such countries. In effect, the question pertains more to manner in which the autocratic rulers have served their parochial interests. Thus, one would find that the phenomenon of state collapse in countries like Liberia, Congo, Yugoslavia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi is not only due to non-democratic systems or institutions in those countries, but also because of other peripheral developments arising out of long non-democratic traditions in the mentioned polities. An attempt is made in the section to deal with the various developments leading to state collapse in the above mentioned countries lying in three continents, Africa, Europe and Latin America respectively.

State collapse in Rwanda – The birth of an ethnocratic state:

At the outset, it should be mentioned that state collapse in Rwanda is the outcome of the State's failure in creating a viable and stable political system in a plural society. Integrative behaviour that involves 'the capacity of people in a society to organize for common purposes',²³ was out of scene in Rwandan polity as the authoritarian rule in the country was patterned along ethnic line with exclusionary policies to exploit the ethnic and class differences to the advantage of the rulers. Perhaps, the regime's utmost failure has been in bringing a kind of integration that could hold together various groups by mutual ties of one kind or another so as to infuse in them a sentiment of common identity and self-awareness.

²³ Integrative behaviour is one of the five types of integration as proposed by Mynor Weiner. Through such behaviour, a capacity is developed in the society which is evenly spread throughout the population. Cited in B. P. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

In Rwanda, a bi-ethnic country, where the political power revolved around two principal ethnic groups, the Tutsi and the Hutu, the exclusionary policies of one towards the other have been the greatest impediment on the way of building meaningful democratic institutions and fostering political integration in the country right from the day the country achieved independence in 1963. The conflict between the two which, in fact, has been manipulated by ideology – the creation of the myth of a traditional feudal system with Tutsi ‘lords’ and ‘Hutu serfs’ had ultimately led the state to attain extreme polarisation in which there has been no longer the possibility of understanding and dialogue or of adjustments of interests between them. Thus, in Rwanda, the Hutu leadership that began to evolve around the person of Juvenal Habyarimana since 1973 began to offset all privileges and status enjoyed by the Tutsi so long. The state power and authority that slowly began to gravitate around Habyarimana’s palace, household, immediate family and militia took little time to make Rwanda a neo-patrimonial polity with rapid shrinking of its power base.²⁴ In consequence, state institutions became fragile and lacked in effectiveness and legitimacy and there had been no scope to mediate the struggle between the competing groups. In an ethnically stratified Rwandan society, concentration of power and authority in the hands of Hutu leadership ultimately kept the Tutsi minority in its lower rung, where their position was subjected to constant exploitation, discrimination and expulsion by the former. In other words, the preservation of Hutu ethnic hegemony was perceived as a necessary condition of state survival and its assurance needed total elimination of rival claimants. While under various constrained circumstances, the Tutsi minority could not oppose the Hutu leadership internally, their strength, however, lied in an opposition force formed by the Tutsi communities living in

²⁴ René Lemarchand, “Patterns of State Collapse and Reconstruction in Central Africa: Reflections on the Crisis in the Great Lakes”, <http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/3/2.htm>, p. 8.

exile in countries like Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi.²⁵ The Rwanda Patriotic Force, which became the external vehicle of Tutsi interests was, therefore, to act only at an opportune moment. 'The more or less systematic exclusion of Tutsi residents in Rwanda from meaningful political participation (beyond a quota system that left few illusions in the minds of its presumptive beneficiaries), along with the refusal of virtually every government to allow the Tutsi population in exile to return to their homeland made the Rwanda state doubly vulnerable. It created a deep and lasting sense of alienation among the resident Tutsi population – in time making them highly receptive to the appeals of their kin-group in exile – while providing the exiles with justification for the 1990 invasion.'²⁶ The 1990 invasion of Rwanda by the Rwanda Patriotic Front, thus, constituted the vantage point from where the Rwandan state started collapsing mainly because of its failure to arrest the most horrifying ethnic violence and carnage hitherto unseen. The invasion, considered by Habyalimana as a Tutsi conspiracy to unseat the Hutu authority set the fire of an ethnic violence with fierce intensity in Rwandan polity. The violence slowly started attaining the dimension of a genocide when Hutu wrath rose to its crescendo following the murder of Burundi's first elected Hutu President in October 1993.²⁷ Due to "kin country syndrome", the event in Burundi had a spill-over effect in the Great Lakes thereby transforming kin solidarities into a powerful weapon of transnational violence. Fuel to such violence was further added and that the Rwandan state finally collapsed in a sea of blood when the plane of President Habyalimana and his homologue in Burundi was shot down and killed by two surface to air missiles in April 1994.²⁸ The

²⁵ Yves Lacoste, *Dictionnaire Géopolitique des Etats* (1996), Flammarion, Paris, 1995, p. 499.

²⁶ René Lemarchand, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Hutu, suspecting that the act could not have been done by anyone other than the Rwanda Patriotic Front vowed to take the revenge on the Tutsi through killings and massacres which eventually resulted in a massive genocide, intensification of civil war between Hutu and Tutsi, the flight of some four million people and interference of few regional countries.

While it is true that many authors subscribe to the theory that state collapse in case of Rwanda is due to genocide and its perverse implications, the fact remains that genocide was, in fact, the outcome of the failure of state machinery to control the Hutu-Tutsi rivalry from the beginning. Both in Rwanda and Burundi, ethnic exclusion resulted in the birth of an ethnocratic state where political involution revolved around few ethnic cronies lacking in political legitimacy, competency and credibility. In the circumstances, there had been the conspicuous lack of institutions to address the viewpoints, desires and grievances of the masses expressed on ethnic lines. The overall implications are well expressed by Rothchild and Groth, "Because state institutions are fragile and lacking in effectiveness and legitimacy, they are a poor vantage point to mediate the struggle between competing groups. Unable to channel participation along predetermined lines, the overloaded state becomes isolated and aloof from society, unable to structure the relations between social interests or between these interests and itself".²⁹

State collapse in Congo – The fallacy of a Strongman leadership : Although, ethnic violence in the form of a near genocide was a factor in the concatenation of events leading to state collapse in Mobutist Congo, the real reasons for it lie in the political decomposition of Congolese state caused by Mobutu himself. It would not probably be improper to say that the regime in Mobutu's Congo is a classic example of authoritarian rule in few African

²⁹ Cited in *ibid.*, p.8.

countries where concentration of power and authority in individual leaders needed: i. privatisation of political power; ii. privatisation of state resources for converting wealth into political resources for buying the loyalty of some and coercing the others; iii. maintaining a patron-client network to surpass all state institutions; iv. aggressive policies to take advantage of regional inequalities; and v. maintaining a foreign patronage to finance all the internal pockets of power. Thus, Mobutu's absolute dictatorial and authoritarian rule, mismanagement and embezzlement of the spoils of state, institutionalisation of corruption, utilisation of army as an instrument of terror rather than as a body to enforce law, order and security, suppression of all political parties and organisations, and above all introduction of Mobutism as a state ideology put a seal on all possibilities of democratic growth and institution building in Zaire.

The regime's failing economic performance further undermined its legitimacy in Zairian polity. Mobutu's economic policies under the banner of Zairianisation dislocated the effective sectors of the economy i.e. agriculture and industry and witnessed a steady decrease in private investment. Due to lack of control over the financial institutions, the country's economy turned into a black market one, beneficiaries of which were mostly those at the helm of state affairs. Eventually, the economy of Congo marked by break down in production and distribution, decline in tax revenues, rampant corruption and soaring unemployment had its direct adverse effects on the collapse of the state.³⁰ It should be mentioned that the deprivation of the masses, both politically and economically, under Mobutu could not attain an ethnic colour as ethnic exclusion has never been a systematic guiding principle of Zairian policies as had

³⁰ Charles N. Mwaura, Josephine W. Njoroge, Marcela Londono Londono, Ozonnia Ojielo, Svetlana Lebed, "Collapsed States and Regional Security: Implications and Considerations", p. 24. Essay presented at the 'Peace and Conflict Studies Programme 2000' under the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at the Uppsala University, Sweden. The author was a participant at the programme.

been the case in Rwanda and Burundi.³¹ Nonetheless, his manipulative tactics adopted for co-opting various ethnic minorities failed to keep Zaire free from ethnic fault lines. In particular, the 'Banyarwanda' consisting of Hutu and Tutsi in eastern Zaire had never been associated with the state despite the fact that these communities migrated to Zaire at various points in time going back to pre-colonial period and considered themselves Zairians.³² The withdrawal of their citizenship rights by the 1981 Nationality Act had a decisive impact on the rise of their collective self-awareness which even survived the Hutu-Tutsi tensions following the invasion of Rwanda by the Tutsi led Rwandan Patriotic Front from neighbourhood. However, the genocide in Rwanda could not go without its negative impact on the Tutsi-Hutu unity that had been maintained by their common awareness of anti-Banyarwanda sentiment among native people. The 'kin country syndrome' soon surfaced out with a vengeance driving Hutu and Tutsi into opposing camps. While native Hutu joined the camp with Interhamwe, the Rwandan Armed Forces and few native supporters in cracking down on the Tutsi, the latter responded by casting their lot with the Rwandan Patriotic Front until they were slaughtered in thousands by the former in collaboration with the Zairian Armed Forces.³³

In a fragile state like Congo, the events ultimately led to a serious crisis that not only shook the power edifice of Congo, but paved the way for Kabila to capture power in an already collapsing state. The coming of Kabila's party, Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo, to power with support from Uganda, Rwanda and Angola explains not only the interference of the outside powers in Congolese internal affair but as well the transformation of an intra-state conflict into an inter-state one where the aims and

³¹ René Lemarchand, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ . René Lemarchand, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

objectives of the parties have been to extract few material gains from the conflict rather than to diffuse it.

In the labyrinth of forces that led to state collapse in Rwanda, Burundi and Congo, one factor that emerges as a common denominator is the **total dysfunction of the state as an instrument of coercion**. In particular, the role of the armed forces in each of these countries has ended in a catastrophic failure due to its direct involvement in ethnic violence and genocide. The army in such cases has been privatised and encouraged to instigate violence for the purpose of serving personal benefits of the respective rulers. In case of Zaire, however, one additional factor needs to be added to the catalogue of forces that caused its collapse, i.e. the withdrawal of outside support to Mobutu's regime. Mobutu's inability to make his government work within his country made him heavily dependent on the Western support. In particular, Zaire became an important US surrogate state during the Cold War when it was used by the latter as a conduit of arms supply to Angolan factions fighting the Soviet backed MPLA regime in Luanda. Since the end of the Cold War, such US interest was lost in Zaire and the weak regime of Mobutu lacked outside support to prevent it from being overwhelmed by domestic rivals. This shows that **external factor** too has its role in precipitating state collapse.

State collapse in Liberia –A case of a regime alienated from the people: Turning our attention to state collapse in Liberia, it would be observed that the constellation of forces that led to state collapse in the country bear resemblance to the ones detected in case of the countries mentioned above. William Reno in his celebrated book *Warlord Politics and African States* concludes, "Liberia was bound to collapse because the leadership in its quest for regime stability and security destroyed the institutions of the state and then

contracted out indispensable state functions to foreign acolytes".³⁴ Without going deep into the history of Liberia as a nation-state, suffice it to say that the country was not a postcolonial state, not having being colonised by any foreign power. The genesis of Liberian statehood lies in the forceful attempt of few freed slaves in American colonies in the West Indies to acquire new territory from the native population of Africa, and hence an early settlement along the coast in Monrovia. The Americo-Liberians as they were called made little or no effort to extend the authority of the state over the entire territory. Territorially, Liberia, thus, appeared to be two distinct countries with the Americo-Liberians being concentrated in Morovia and other cities on the coast, while the native population being concentrated in the interior part of the country.³⁵ Lack of interaction and accommodation among these two communities made the task of political and economic administration of the country a difficult one, exacerbated further by the discriminatory policies of the Americo-Liberians vis-à-vis the natives. While the former represented the political, administrative and economic machinery of the state, the absence of the former in the domain had been glaring. As a result, one observes the lack of an inclusive national bureaucracy to sustain state administration, absence of social mobility and assimilation, presence of skewed patterns of modernisation and economic development, growth of social tension due to oppression of and discrimination against the natives etc., were few fault lines whose implosion had been only a matter of time.

If in Liberian politics, the Americo-Liberian factor had been an impediment on the way of a just and acceptable political, social and economic system, then things were to go in right direction after Master Sergeant Samuel K Doe had overthrown President William

³⁴ William Reno, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

³⁵ See for details Charles N. Mwaura, Josephine W. Njoroge, Marcela Londono Londono, Ozonnia Ojiela and Svetlana Lebed, *op. cit.* pp. 18-20.

Tolbert on 12 April 1980, the latter representing an aristocracy dominated by Americo-Liberians. However, Doe's coming to power, looked upon as a liberation or a second independence for the Liberians, failed to bring positive reforms for the latter in political, economic or social domains.³⁶ The lust for power, both political and economic, led Doe to sustain a bureaucracy consisting of elite considered by him as his political, military and economic favourites. Within a short time, the Liberian politics, therefore, witnessed the emergence of a strong political man who asserted absolute political authority over virtually all the state apparatus. In particular, the element of corruption that marked Doe's regime created much disillusionment and disenchantment among the masses who had so long been looking for few positive changes in the country's political and economic order.

A critical review of Doe's regime would reveal weaknesses on several fronts. First to take notice of would be the political shamble caused by Doe. Coming to power through a *coup d'état*, the new Liberian ruler practically had no idea to transform the country into a democracy or to advance economic and social equality. His regime had been an unrepresentative one detached from all the segments of the society. In effect, state governance, in Doe's eye, meant nothing more than concentrating political and economic opportunities in himself and his surrogates, thereby fostering a system of dependence and patronage for clinging to power. Doe could manipulate state power with the proceeds from state owned mineral and other companies. The authority was also bolstered, like the one of Mobuto, though aid from the USA that Doe succeeded in procuring, thanks to his anti-Soviet and anti-Libya rhetorics. The election held under the regime of Doe mainly to secure internal legitimacy was so fatally flawed that at one time Liberia was under the US threat of aid

³⁶ See William Reno, "The Organization of Warlord Politics in Liberia", *op.cit.*, pp. 79-111.

suspension to the country. In effect, all pervasive political and economic power that Doe accumulated over the years enabled him to build a *war chest* with which he could buy off the opposition, assassinate the opponents and manipulate those who refused to compromise. Thus, Liberia under Doe fell into a criteria that Robert Jackson terms as quasi-state in which “rulers possess sovereignty by virtue of a globally recognised people’s right to a particular territory. They did not gain political authority primarily from internal legitimacy, bureaucratic efficiency, nurturing of local revenue resources or attractiveness to foreign investors”.³⁷

Added to political disorder in Liberia is the economic malfunctioning of the state. The concentration of state wealth in the hands of few and the privatisation of the Liberian economy where public and private interests combined to manipulate state prerogatives to create disorder for their personal and group advantage led to what William Reno calls ‘criminalisation of the state’.³⁸ As well, the militarisation of the economy led to the emergence of gangs and rival security forces, and hence conflicts among them for having an upper hand in trafficking in diamonds, ivory and other products. The sources of external aid to Liberia being dried up, Doe found it difficult to meet its economic obligations to people and sustain his patronage network. Under the external pressures, the economic liberalisation policy that Doe adopted in Liberia failed miserably to meet the economic expectations of the masses. It was more a design to placate the IMF and the World Bank than a measure to bring economic well-being to the country. Indeed, Liberia is a classic example of where the attempt by international financial institutions to promote economic liberalisation actually ends up sustaining the private control by a government of the state

³⁷ Cited in William Reno, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

³⁸ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 40.

economy.³⁹ All the privatised assets of the state are transformed to acolytes of the strongman in power. Therefore, rather than liberating the forces of civil society and creating an independent class of entrepreneurs, reforms actually entrenched regime control of the market. In the final analysis, it can be said that the regime of Doe had only a mute response to continuing economic crisis of his country marked by stagnant growth, lack of domestic capital, dearth of foreign aid, intense distributional conflict, soaring unemployment, growing urban migration of underclass, rise of informal economy and its dominance by corrupt state actors etc.

The political and economic malaise of Liberia took a further gloomier look due to the presence of societal tension and unrest. Doe's administration had been carried on a very narrow ethnic line as *Krahns*, constituting no more than four percent of population, were represented in various state units. 'Doe's seizure of power was neither 'a military coup nor was it a revolution against Americo-Liberian domination of the indigenous peoples. Rather, it was a coup within a marginal institution (the military had no power and low status under Tubman and Tolbert), by a socially marginal element, the Krahn. Doe and his ilk were simply the first generation of warlords. They introduced inter-ethnic rivalry, not unity, did little to liberate and develop the so-called tribal peoples (except the Krahn and some of their ethnic allies)'. All such weaknesses ultimately led the nation to a point where Doe's successor Charles Taylor finally launched his insurrection against the state in the form of a violent ethnic conflict, thereby bringing the entire state edifice crumbling down.⁴⁰ Taylor's rebellion took little time to take an ethnic hue and indiscriminately killed unarmed civilians including women and

³⁹ Charles N. Mwaura, Josephine W. Njoroge, Marcela Londono Londono, Ozonnia Ojielo and Svetlana Lebel, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁰ Charles N. Mwaura, Josephine W. Njoroge, Marcela Londono Londono, Ozonnia Ojielo and Svetlana Lebed, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

children. The scenario attained a more critical dimension when his movement got splintered into several factions with arms in hands. Fearing that the internal conflict in Liberia would have its serious implications on peace and stability in the region, the countries of the region soon constituted a monitoring group (ECOMOG) to disarm the parties and enforce a peace agreement. However, it was after seven years of blood bath that the Abuja Peace Accord succeeded in bringing a semblance of peace in the country when Taylor took the responsibility of reconstructing the state of Liberia after the general elections in 1998 as stipulated in the Accord.

The above trends which practically mark the authoritarian rule in each of the African collapsed states taken under study depict, in general, the doubt and suspicion that the majority of the countries in the continent possessed with respect to their respective viability. Born out of an arbitrary dissection of territory without ethnic, tribal and clan considerations, most of the patrimonial postcolonial African states sought to survive on globally recognised sovereignty rather than in their efforts for building conventional institutions of political, economic and social authority.⁴¹ For most of the African rulers, state sovereignty needed to be materially manifested in their persons to which accountability with respect to internal legitimacy, bureaucratic efficiency, effective economic functioning etc. was out of question. In most cases, the rulers became the symbols of sovereignty and their stay in power was considered too sacrosanct to be challenged by any opposition. In societies where various groups claimed for their respective ethnic, tribal and clan identity, such intolerance coupled

⁴¹ Robert Jackson uses the criteria 'quasi-state' to describe the phenomenon. Such states did not gain political authority primarily from internal legitimate, bureaucratic efficiency, nurturing of local revenue sources, or attractiveness to foreign investors. Instead, the possession of globally recognised sovereignty, with its access to international organisations and creditworthiness allowed rulers to claim resources from powerful outside patrons. See William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder, London, 1998, p. 18.

with political and economic injustice could neither deepen nor strengthen the root of statehood.

The phenomenon of state collapse in two non-African countries, Yugoslavia and Colombo, follows a pattern somehow different from the one as observed in case of the African states. **State collapse in Yugoslavia – The case of misgovernance** : Despite changes in the territorial configuration of former Yugoslavia at several points of history and its ill-conceived ethnic composition, Tito's authoritarian rule under the aegis of his own directed communist party had been an important political force to unite the country's disparate ethno-religious groups. Even after Tito's death in 1980, his successors could effectuate a peaceful transfer of power to the collective state and Party presidencies dominated by them. "The role they chose to play was that of faithful guardians of the system: their main missions well encapsulated in the slogan "after Tito, Tito", and was to keep the system unchanged. Tito's popularity encouraged his successors to believe that the political system created when he was in power was equally popular".⁴²

While it is true that the federal experiment was, to a certain extent, successful in promoting economic growth and ameliorating ethnic conflict, the six republics were not equally satisfied with the distribution of state largesse. In particular, the wealthier republics (notably Croatia and Slovenia) resented for bearing the economic burdens of the more economically backward parts of the federation.⁴³ Also, the growing demand for local autonomy by the republics and their opposition to the imperative of consensus decision making in Belgrade resulted not in greater inter-regional co-operation but in an increasing weak central state. With time, even the communist party

⁴² Branka Magas, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Verso, New York, 1993, p. 244.

⁴³ Ivo H. Daalder, "Fear and Loathing in the Former Yugoslavia" in Michael E. Brown (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*, The MIT Press, London, 1996, p. 41.

became fragmented along regional lines, leaving only the Yugoslav National Army as a manifestation of national unity and a mechanism for central control.⁴⁴ During the eighties, the scenario further attained a critical dimension due to failing economy and increasing factional politics in Yugoslavia. In the end, as Ivo H Daalder observes, "Yugoslavia was little more than a confederation consisting of eight separate units; the basis of political legitimacy had shifted from the federal state to the local level, laying the foundation for Yugoslavia's eventual disintegration".⁴⁵

Any understanding of the state collapse in Yugoslavia should, therefore, take into account its decade long precipitous economic decline, weakening political and constitutional system and the resulting social unrest. Virulent nationalism, which to many, appears to be the most crucial factor leading the Federation towards a state collapse, is a phenomenon nothing other than a direct consequence of the mentioned symptoms. Politics in Yugoslavia has never been ethnicised nor was there any attempt in the past to exploit the differences among the ethnic groups to the advantage of the rulers as observed in case of the African states. In effect, emergence of ethnic fault lines in Yugoslavian polity is a belated phenomenon and it finds its origin in the political strategy of Slobodan Milosevic to use state defined nationalism i.e., Serbian nationalism, to keep and extend his power and of the Communist Party that he led.⁴⁶ The original aims of Serb nationalism were to prevent fragmentation of Yugoslavia by recentralising power in Belgrade and extending control over the state apparatus. The objectives remained far from being realised. In particular, the movement toward recentralisation and authoritarianism created sharp reaction in other parts of Yugoslavia where the scheme was considered as Milosevic's grand

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

design of creating a 'Greater Serbia' in the future. The road was, therefore, ultimately curved out for an endless row of nationalist claims within the federation.

A series of intra-state secessionist wars in which Yugoslavia got entangled since 1991 represents a complex mosaic of hostilities emanating from such virulent nationalism as Serbian, Slovene, Albanian and Croatian. The result being that new sovereign states i.e., Bosnia, Slovenia and Croatia emerged as independent states with due recognition by the international community.⁴⁷ During the midst of crisis, the UN sanctions imposed against Yugoslavia led to an open gray economy in the country with smuggling and corruption being at its centre. In addition, the Yugoslavian crisis resulted in the emergence of warlords – people who controlled the market and the organised crimes. In short, the catastrophe and violence that accompanied the Yugoslavian crisis created a humanitarian crisis with millions of refugees, hundreds of thousands of casualties and the threat of widespread starvation that, by all logical conclusions, portrayed Yugoslavia as a case of state failure.⁴⁸

State collapse in Colombia – A powerful central authority in limbo : Colombia, the oldest democracy in South America, has witnessed such turbulence and traumas in its democratic practice that the country not only failed in its democratic experience but that it now stands at a juncture better marked by such features as political instability, absence of a central authority with control over the national territory, the presence of rural and urban guerrilla militancy, the conflict between the guerrillas and the regular security forces with the support of the paramilitaries, civil disorder, economic malfunctioning etc.⁴⁹ Due to such aberration in its politico-economic

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁸ Charles N. Nwaura, Josephine W. Njoroge, Marcela Londono Londono, Ozonnia Ojielo and Svetlana Lebed, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁹ *The Economist*, April 21st, 2001.

life, Colombia is increasingly being referred to as a 'failed state' primarily for the reason that the central government now finds itself in a very precarious position to address the problems mentioned above. As a result, there is now a growing fear that its internal instability could eventually have its spill-over effects on the neighbouring countries threatening thereby sub-regional and regional security.

In effect, Colombia, since its independence from Spain, has not succeeded in establishing a powerful central authority and that it was thought to be more as a set of dominions ruled by local bosses than as a cohesive state exerting effective authority through the rule of law. The fault lies in the perennial power struggle between the traditional parties – conservative and liberal- to the extent of an open bloody inter-party confrontation between them during the 1950s. The ensuing riots and subsequent feuding between the supporters of the two parties developed into a rural civil war, fuelled partly by land disputes. In a decade of bloodletting and guerrilla warfare known as *la violencia*, between 100,000 and 200,000 died.⁵⁰ The national trauma that led to a brief period of military government was followed by formal power sharing between the two governments as per an arrangement known as National Front (1958). Under the National Front, the two parties agreed to alternate in the presidency for 16 years and to divide ministerial jobs and Congress seats between them. Although, the agreement succeeded in bringing the inter-party conflict of the 1950s to an end, it had serious repercussions on the country's polity. In the first place, the National Front arrangement was thought to be undemocratic in nature as all other political forces were excluded from it. As a result, there had been an inaction and stalemate in the political process and voter apathy. Moreover, the National Front government worked in a state of emergency, which

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

blocked political competition and curtailed civil liberties. The front had the paradoxical effect of weakening the two main parties, because political competition took place within each party rather than between them. The later became deideologised and lost its ability to mobilise and represent large sectors of the society, which they had relatively managed to do in the past.⁵¹ More importantly, the National Front government's inability to address social, economic and political problems created breeding ground for urban protests, radicalisation of peasant movements, urban and rural guerrilla movement. In particular, unequal landholding and violence forced thousands of peasants to immigrate in the 1960s and 1970s to the unpopulated and government neglected Southern plains where cultivation of coca and illegal drug trade began to develop at an alarming rate.

It may be mentioned that for the past two decades, Colombia has been the world's main supplier of cocaine. Its role in the industry was originally that of an entreport. It would import the coca (whose leaves provide the raw material for the drug) in semi-processed form from Peru and Bolivia, and re-export it as refined cocaine to the US and Europe. But in the 1990s, coca growing became concentrated in Colombia. The guerrilla groups controlling this area succeeded in their mission as there was no state control in the area, and they could finance themselves out of revenue on this production, and on various illegal economic activities.⁵² What has been more horrendous is the drug-related violence. While violence is not a new phenomenon in Colombian society, it has taken a new shape due to drug factor. The drug gangs have turned a generation of unemployed urban youths into *sicarios* or hired killers. At the same time, the drug

⁵¹ Charles N. Mwaura, Josephine W. Njoroge, Marcela Londono Londono, Ozonnia Ojielo and Sventlana Lebed, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-14.

⁵² Monica Serrano, "America Latina : La nueve agenda de seguridad, Foro International, Vol. 38, No. 1, January-March, 1998, p. 136.

business has supplied finance, and given new military strength to three irregular armies. On the left, the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) and, on the right, bands of paramilitary vigilants, most of whom are organised in the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). The role of the central authority in controlling these drug business and the criminal activities related to it, has met with failure and has led the government to keep half of this vast country under writ that includes the cities where most Colombians live.⁵³

While it is true Colombia's problems have been hugely aggravated by drugs leading it to a state of lawlessness, critics ascribe Colombia's difficulties mainly to what they consider to be the failing of its democracy and see the guerrillas as the product of political exclusion and socio-economic injustice. Even the new constitution of 1991 that opted for more democratic and political participation. In other words, a sort of 'redemocratisation', has met with little success in meeting the expectations of the masses. In effect, Colombia is currently undergoing a process of 'political deconsolidation' due to reasons like (i) 'deideologisation of the parties which has forced them to mobilise political support through patron-client networks, excluding thereby large segments of society; (ii) persistence of weak, fragmented and inefficient institutions, which has undermined the capacity of the central government to control the territory and to maintain a firm monopoly over the use of force; and finally, (iii) the ineffectiveness of the state in addressing and solving social and political local conflicts.⁵⁴

The above case studies permit us to discern the indicators of state decay and their relative importance. *First*, needless to say here

⁵³ The Economist, *op.cit.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

that in all cases, among other indicators, leadership failure becomes the first factor to contribute to the process of state collapse. An undemocratic leadership with excessive concentration of power in an individual hand is found to jeopardise not only the political participation of the masses but as well the effective functioning of state institutions. As leaders sought to remain in power through all means, legal and illegal, the regimes became more exclusionary as they exploited differences and regional inequalities to survive and by creating patron-client networks to surpass state institutions, resulting in institutional collapse and the constriction of the political space in all the cases studied. In the circumstances, a gradual erosion of the functions and power of the central authority took place. However, Colombia may be taken as an exception; it is not a collapsed state, but rather a state gravitating towards collapse.

Second, along with the leadership failure, poor economic performance due to internal and external factors, stands out to be an important factor contributing to state collapse. Economic mismanagement and the wasteful misallocation of resources reduce the rate of economic growth and affect the efficacy of the state in its delivery of goods and services, in particular, its capacity to provide security to its citizens. The economic crisis renders the state impotent in performing its basic functions, the result being that various armed groups and warlords emerge to challenge the state control over economic and political space.

Third, ethnic nationalism and violence generated out of it has been the triggering event to sharpen the edge of internal conflict in most of the cases except in Colombia where there is no ethnic pattern leading to state collapse, but there is social exclusion on ethnic terms. In this connection, it should be mentioned that although sub-nationalism and ethnicity are factors of state collapse, the

performance of political leadership in managing ethnic relations is an important feature of how ethnicity affects state collapse.

Lastly, the transitional phase of political and economic reforms in most cases has been fraught with problems and constraints, as the new leadership was unable to restart and sustain political and economic growth. This is true in case of Liberia, RRC and Yugoslavia where the political transition after the authoritarian rule witnessed little progress both in politics and economics due to misrule of the new rulers.

SECTION III

STATE COLLAPSE: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

The above discussion clearly reveals the message that performance in various spheres of a state's life i.e., political, economic, social and cultural is the ultimate indicator of its strength or weakness. In principle, each and every state is expected to be strong, and in this sense, performance is to be seen as a continuum where a state's overlapping politico-economic and social functions would seek to guarantee its subjects a political leadership with general acceptability and high degree of legitimacy, domestic stability, a sense of community, security against all threats of external and internal nature, general economic prosperity and well being etc. The failure to deliver the mentioned benefits through the discharge of a regular set of functions would ultimately turn a state weak or fragile.

The paper does not intend to go into a detailed discussion on the concept of weak state that has been defined and interpreted in a number of ways. Suffice it to mention that a state is weak because it has failed in its state building capacity for ensuring political,

economic and social stability in its polity.⁵⁵ The inherent weakness in such areas has continually kept the regimes in power vulnerable to various pressures and resistance at home, the result being that there has been a gradual tendency to increase and exercise coercive machinery of the state (despotic power) to protect the existence and vested interests of the elites holding power at the expense of the societal interests. Whereas, in the process, the states have shown little interest in acquiring infrastructural power which could enhance state capacity for penetrating the society and implement political, social and economic decisions through appropriate apparatus and mechanisms. Judged in this light, one should be frank enough to admit that most of the Third World states are, till to date, weak states.

However, the weak or fragile states are not to be placed under the rubric of 'collapsed states'. A state, in the downward sloping trajectory towards its final collapse, can still sustain itself by remaining weak or fragile, as is the case with most of the Third World states. This probably leads many analysts to argue that weakness or fragility of a state is the sign of its societal collapse and not of its own collapse, unless the fragility is intensified by few other factors to culminate itself ultimately in a state collapse. In this sense, weak or fragile states may be considered to be the precursors of collapsed or failed states. The transition from state weakness or fragility to state collapse or failure is explained by a number of variables. In this connection, most of the analysts and scholars tend to argue that the weak or fragile states, already affected by the degenerative diseases due to failure in state-building process, needed only few extreme situations for eventual collapse. A careful study shows that such situations are the by-products of the end of Cold

⁵⁵ See for details, Navnita Chadha-Behera, "State Making: Weak States and Foreign Policies: A Comparative Perspective of India and Pakistan", *BISS Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1996, pp. 75-95.

War and are generally studied under such headings as: (i) the withdrawal of superpower support from vulnerable regimes; (ii) near erosion of the international norm guaranteeing the integrity of states; and (iii) the issue of ethno-national self-determination.⁵⁶ Each of these points needs further elaboration.

The withdrawal of superpower support

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the most of the Third World states have been facing a dilemma with respect to their internal and external security for the reasons already explained above. Unable to meet many of their security requirements on their own, in particular, security against external threats, these countries turned into few protégés of big powers during the period of Cold War. In the central balance of power held by the two superpowers, the majority of the Third World peripheral countries were to act as the mere weights to keep the balance favourable to either of the two. As a result, many of the new states despite their political, economic and social weakness became militarily powerful due to high superpower military involvement and consequent transfer of arms. The superpowers also aided such countries economically in their bid to restore a minimum level of stability in the internal domain of their allies. As Mohammed Ayoob remarks, 'At the height of the Cold War, the superpowers often attempted to shore up client governments in internally fragmented states in order to maintain a semblance of stability in countries that were their allies. One major instrument of this support was the transfer of large quantities of relatively sophisticated arms to friendly regimes. Such arm transfers by one frequently led to countervailing transfers of weaponry by the rival superpowers to forces opposed to the central authorities'.⁵⁷ Following the end of Cold War, the withdrawal and disengagement

⁵⁶ Mohammed Ayoob, *op.cit.*, pp. 173-174.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

of the superpowers from various trouble spots in the World created a situation where large quantities of available arms in fragile and volatile societies were used internally to challenge the central authority or back up intra-ethnic rivalry or criminalise economies. As the cases of Somalia, Afghanistan and Zaire suggest, the central authority in each of these countries was sustained by superpower support, both political and economic – support that prevented them from being overwhelmed by their domestic rivals and various factions within them. The prevalence of arms in such societies and their use by the various factions for realising their respective goals ultimately created anarchical situations leading them to a state collapse.

Near erosion of the international norm guaranteeing the integrity of state

Since the end of World War II, the international system has come to consist of states that, despite the inequality among them with respect to size, population, resources, military capability etc., have received international recognition to their status as nation-states due to their enjoyment of juridical sovereignty respectively. The state sovereignty as a norm, in fact, permitted many weak Third World states to survive and withstand the most critical moments of their infant statehood in the immediate post-colonial period, thereby assuring in perpetuity each state's territorial integrity. Also, the interest of the superpowers in maintaining stability in the periphery acted as a positive factor in preventing any break-up of the states to the detriment of their interests. However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the break-up of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia and the quick admission of the newly emerged states into the UN seem to send a message that the international community is no longer committed to the maintenance

of existing state boundaries.⁵⁸ At a minimum, as a Carnegie Endowment study has stated, "The old assumption that the boundaries set after World War II were permanent has been shaken by events in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia".⁵⁹ The events also suggest the disinterest of the superpower and other great powers and their less stake in maintaining the territorial status quo not only in the Third World but also in the peripheral areas of Europe as in the Balkans.

The rise of ethno-nationalism and ethno-national self-determination

It has been observed empirically that the rise of ethno-nationalism has acted as the final triggering point to lead a state towards collapse. Taken to its logical conclusion, if extreme situations are needed to let the aggrieved and deprived sentiments of the masses find an outlet, it is though violent manifestation of ethnic nationalism that such outlet has been possible. In effect, ethnic nationalism is what Jack Snyder identifies as 'the default option' that "predominates when institutions collapse, when existing institutions are not fulfilling people's basic needs and when satisfactory alternatives are not readily available".⁶⁰

Without going deep into a theoretical discussion on the phenomenon of ethnic nationalism as observed in several parts of the globe, suffice it to mention that the failure of the majority of Third World states in state building and their hegemonistic and assimilationist policies of denying the diverse populations of recognition, accommodation and representation have been instrumental in fostering hypernationalism at some specific point in time. Thus, a permanent minority which feels threatened or its status

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁶⁰ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 171.

constantly diminished and subordinated begins to seethe and simmer until, in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a last resort people will rebel and conflict ensue.

Although ethnic conflicts are studied under different nomenclatures i.e., internal conflicts, new wars, small wars, civil wars, conflict in post-colonial states etc., a common trait to mark them is the extreme form of violence that associates them. The result being that resolution of ethnic conflict becomes an increasingly difficult enterprise as it involves meeting incompatible goals of the parties involved in it. On many occasions, such conflicts become protracted social conflicts. And as Azar and Nordliner argue, such type of conflicts is difficult to tackle and can only be regulated in the long run than in the short run. In the process, the wealth and resources of the state are exhausted and the authority of the state over its juridical territory is rendered untenable. The diminishing role of the state, thus, is dictated by the nature of violence, its course and intensity all along the conflict trajectory.

SECTION IV

REVITALISING COLLAPSED STATES AND ARRESTING THE PHENOMENON

At the outset, it should be mentioned that failed states typically do not go away. While in the earlier period, many unviable states were annexed by or partitioned among the powerful neighbours, this is no feasible in the current international system. Under the circumstances, failed states are left with no other option other than groaning under continual anarchy and suffering thereby posing challenges to neighbouring states, regional stability and international security. Helman and Ratner make this argument in pointing out that 'economic and political collapse, accompanied by civil strife and

breakdown of critical social systems such as food and health, invariably lead to mass refugee movements to neighbouring countries. Coupled with the fact that states tend to fail in regions where other fragile states exist, these refugee movements place serious strains on those neighbouring countries. It is possible that a cycle of regional state failure could result from the persistence of a failed state. Moreover, the neighbouring states may be drawn into the conflict, both directly and indirectly, from the use of their territory for illicit arms trafficking to support provided by related ethnic groups (which might even include protagonists seeking to set up safe havens across weak and permeable national boundaries). There is also a “tangible risk that such conflict will spill over into other countries”.⁶¹

The collapsed states taken under case study have in various ways affected regional security, although the impact in each region has been varied. However, in all cases, it has been found that (i) there has been the disruption of legitimate commerce and rise of illegal one, best referred to as “black market and gray economy”. This form of economic disengagement has not only undercut the state but has also very adversely affected the economies of neighbouring countries; (ii) refugees in neighbouring countries constituted a security threat in the asylum state and served as recruiting grounds for armed rebels and militias who further escalated threats to regional security; (iii) coupled with the rise of illegitimate commerce and the refugee situation is the emergence of warlords politics for determining the distribution of wealth, control of illegal commerce, the forging of alliance among fellow warlords, the control of activities either to threaten regional security or to invite external intervention; (iv) the emergence of warlords and their control over illegitimate commerce has led to the proliferation of small arms and

⁶¹ Cited in Robert H. Dorff, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

light weapons which further escalated armed violence in existing and new forms of conflict; (v) the condition of vulnerability to internal and external disruption has been openly exposed. This is best observed in case of Colombia where the state failing has been exploited by the criminal elements; (vi) there has been outright challenge to human rights regimes due to its egregious violations in case of women and children.

Revitalising collapsed states, therefore, becomes a stupendous task despite the fact that the factors that generate such collapse are well known to all. However, suggestions are plenty to cure the disease like restoring the rule of law and good governance, resuscitating the macro economy, re-establishing local government and other political institutions, empowering the civil society, sustaining international commitments etc. The strategy, therefore, lies in curing the disease at its root level. A quite disheartening aspect is the lack of interest on the part of states close to the victims for rendering meaning aid and assistance. As a result, the UN and its related organisations and few NGOs have, in recent times, become more active in intervening in the domestic affairs of collapsed or collapsing states to re-establish governing authority, help displaced populations and stop gross violations of human rights. As it appears, the collapse of a state anywhere in the world is seen as a matter for the international community only since it is the international community that as a whole is felt to be endangered and affected if one of its members ceases to function.

However, a more ominous picture comes to light when the 'collapsed state' is seen as an elemental phenomenon, which though currently acute in only a few countries remains latent throughout the world.⁶² It is being speculated that many Third World states are becoming less viable due to a myriad of challenges, both external

⁶² Daniel Thurer, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

and internal. The fragility of such states caused by social, economic and political malfunctioning is so palpable that anytime they may fall apart. In fact, the fragility of such states is such an ongoing problem that the Vice President Al Gore asked the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to explain and predict the collapse of authority in weak states.⁶³ The study known as the **State Failure Task Force** focused on mass killings, revolutions, ethnic warfare and violent overthrows of government as evidence of breakdowns in internal authority. It also found that the success or failure by states chiefly depends on the degree of democracy, the available wealth for distribution, the infant mortality rate as an indicator of quality of life, the extent of international trade, and the numbers of unemployed youth.⁶⁴ By all conclusions, therefore, the state today is 'less hard shelled in its sovereignty regarding outside world and less able to assert authority inside'. As Susan Strange observes, 'The state is leaking authority above and below, with other actors supplementing the services of the state' and she compares states to "...old tress, hollow in the middle, showing signs of weakness and vulnerability to storm, drought or disease, yet continuing to grow leaves, new shoots and branches"⁶⁵

The phenomenon of collapsed states, therefore, poses two formidable challenges for the international community. While the first one is related to the rejuvenation of those states that have already collapsed through measures like legitimate governance, economic growth and development, humanitarian relief operation, intervention of the UN, NGOs and PVOs etc., the second one relates to adopting a preventive strategy aimed at reconciling the task of state building with the human demands for social, political and

⁶³ Conway W. Henderson, *International Relations: Conflict and Cooperation at the Turn of the 21st Century*, McGraw Hill, London, New York, 1998, p. 65.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

economic rights. As Mohammed Ayooob remarks, "Despite the daunting nature of the task, ruling elites in individual Third World states must make every effort to reconcile these contradictory demands by charting a course for a political order that is both effective and legitimate; otherwise, the Third World's security predicament will become more acute in the post-Cold War era. This problem could lead to worse interethnic strife, near-political anarchy, and the dismemberment or failure of vulnerable Third World states".⁶⁶

The strategy, therefore, is a rescue operation aimed at preventing a situation from sliding toward state decay or disintegration. And it is to be implemented indigenously with formidable political will as no amount of external intervention can preserve the social and political order within a state if such will is lacking among the domestic actors. Finally, it can be said that the phenomenon of collapsed state having its direct links with security is now looked at from the perspective of human security where the state, if it desires to exist, must guarantee the security of human beings in terms of physical safety, politico-economic and social rights, human dignity and development opportunity.

CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of state collapse, a long-term degenerative disease is curable only when the political, economic and social efforts by the state authority for the wellbeing of the masses are rendered through the perspective of state building. A state's existence finds its *raison d'être* in the very fundamental fact that it has to discharge duties and services for the people that it consists of. Any deviation from this obligation would lead to catastrophic experiences observable not only in the case of the collapsed states but also in many fragile Third World states still groaning under

⁶⁶ Mohammed Ayooob, *op.cit.*, p. 177.

political, economic and social instability and unrest. For the latter, the experience of collapsed states is, therefore, an example that should be avoided. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that 'strengthening weak states against failure is far easier than reviving them after they have definitively failed or collapsed'.⁶⁷ More ominous in case of the latter is the suggestion for recolonization of few countries, in particular, in the continent of Africa, by many, under the garb of humanitarianism. While wars, famines, plight of refugees, ruins etc. can be tackled through external aid and assistance from the richer world, maintenance of territorial integrity and sovereignty in most of these states would require the locals to assume the responsibility. Thus, in case of states that have already failed and in case of those who are prone to failure, the need of the hour is to set up administrative structure with infrastructural power to enhance state capacity. This would allow the state to penetrate the society and implement political, social, and economic decisions through appropriate executive, legislative and judicial apparatus and mechanisms.

As observed from our study, the weak state syndrome does not necessarily lead to state collapse until such weakness attains a critical dimension to spread 'cancer of chaos' in the form of ethnic violence, violent social unrest, civil war, rise of militias etc. Overcoming this weakness is, therefore, a formidable task and involves undertaking development programmes tuned to certain ethos like rational utilization of resources, economic progress, social justice, inter-generational equity, environmental protection etc. Needless to say that in an age of globalisation, the current international system prescribes, in one way or other, various methods for arriving at such ends. The onus, therefore, is on the respective national governments for achieving the stated goals with a minimum level of national

⁶⁷ Robert I. Rotberg, *op. cit.*

unity, consensus and political participation. In a scenario of extreme ethnic polarization, what can at best be suggested is to go for a *policy of unity in diversity*. Empirical evidences suggest that this has been successful in many cases.

In contemporary world, state weakness cannot continue to remain a permanent phenomena as it ultimately leads to state disintegration with serious implications for peace and stability in the geographical segment where it takes place. By now, many states are well aware about the causes that bring about their collapse, and they are as well trying to identify which are the critical, secondary and tertiary causes and what is their relative importance and on what time scale they work. While understanding the process of state collapse and taking measures to combat them essentially remains a national task, the international community too has an obligation to address the problems of the weak and fragile states by playing a more proactive role. This is because, while preventing state failure is imperative, difficult and costly, yet, doing so 'is profoundly in the interest not only of the inhabitants of the most deprived and ill governed states of the world, but also of world peace'.⁶⁸ To the dismay of many, few perceptible current trends in the international system may cap any possible role of the international community in arresting state failure in an effective and just manner.

The current international system marked by unipolarity, structural conflict between the North and the South, increasing pace of globalisation in favour of the richer nations, the West's craving for resources located in the Third World, marginalization of the poor and undeveloped nations in international trade and commerce etc. do not favour the weaker or those nations that are on the way of development. More frustrating is the fact that their hope and aspiration for world peace and stability under the aegis of the UN

⁶⁸ Robert I. Rotberg, *op. cit.*

have been shaken to a great extent following the recent US led invasion of Iraq without any UN mandate. The credibility that the world body attained in the aftermath of the Gulf crisis seems to have eroded by now, and the Third World remains increasingly doubtful and skeptical about the prospects for conflict management or resolution either through any regional organization or the UN. The weak and the fragile states vulnerable to a future collapse must recognize the fact that prospects for concerted international efforts in salvaging them from this eventuality may not be forthcoming in the future as stakes and interests of the nations in such endeavour may not be in harmony with each other. As Robert I. Rothberg remarks, "... making the world safer by strengthening weak states against failure is dependent on the political will of the wealthy big power arbiters of world security".⁶⁹ Thus, the ultimate panacea for the weak states in avoiding any possible collapse would lie in their respective efforts for making themselves as permanent entities on the very basic fundamental that 'state system exists to serve the needs of humanity and thus it should be politically, economically, socially, culturally and morally viable for all time'.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*