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## **DO THE WEAK AND COLLAPSED STATES POSE A CHALLENGE TO THE REALIST WORLDVIEW?**

### **Abstract**

Weak and collapsed states are portrayed as the primary global threat to security so frequently by the politicians, journalists and policy makers that it has almost become a reality. Yet, this seemingly universalised and undertheorised concept bears a different meaning to each actors and demands critical examination. From an international relations perspective, this paper examines the extent to which the weak and collapsed states challenge the realist account of maintaining world order. Conceptualising state weakness, this paper outlines the key realist assumptions to contrast those in weak states' context. Highlighting the realists underpinning that the structure of international system is resilient, the paper concludes that the concept of weak and collapsed states is a political construction and such states do not constitute a critical mass challenging the essential continuity of international order. International system is still dominated by powerful states and the opportunity for weak states to graduate upward under a resilient international system tends to outweigh the forces of weak and collapsed states, keeping the realist account of world order undaunted.

### **1. Introduction**

Notwithstanding the inherent ambiguity, lack of rigour and specificity associated with the concept of state weakness,<sup>1</sup> there is an apparent consensus that such states disappoint the realist world view of achieving and maintaining international order and security not least because they represent an 'antithesis' to what policy makers and academics deem as modern 'state'.<sup>2</sup> Realists assume 'states' as rational unitary actors, constituent repository of power and authority that operate in an anarchic international system in pursuit of their national interests. In contrast, weak and collapsed states are often characterised as 'mere juridical' entities with 'negative sovereignty'<sup>3</sup> and are perceived by some as the 'greatest security challenge' begging

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<sup>1</sup> See S. Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State Society Relations and Capabilities in the Third World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988; E. H. Jackson, *Quasi States: Sovereignty, International Relation and the Third World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Also see Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International System in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*, London: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> For the 'idea of state', see Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear - An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), England: Pearson Education Limited, 1991, pp. 69-82.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson opines that despite inherent weaknesses, international norm of anti-colonialism, self-determination, democracy and egalitarianism paved the way for the creation and existence of such 'mere

to be 'fixed' in order to maintain international political order.<sup>4</sup> But, do these weak and collapsed states constitute a 'critical mass' to challenge the realist worldview<sup>5</sup> of international order or is it just a political construction? To answer this question, this paper examines the issue under three broad segments. Section 2 contextualises the agenda and sets the conceptual foundation navigating through the highly fragmented and overlapping literature on state weakness. Section 3 elaborates the key realists' assumptions and contrasts those in the weak and collapsed states' context. Section 4 examines whether the weak and collapsed states constitute a critical mass challenging the essential continuity of international political order as viewed by the realists. Finally, the paper contends that although the weak and collapsed states represent an 'antithesis' of what a modern state should be, the perceived threats from such states challenging the realist worldview is a misleading political construction. The international system dominated by powerful states is resilient to withstand any such unit level changes keeping the realist account of world order undaunted.

## 2. State Weakness: Context and Concept

### 2.1 Contextualising the Agenda: A Misleading Political Construction?

At the heart of this analysis lies the importance attached to the seemingly universalised and under-theorised concept of weak and collapsed states<sup>6</sup> and its implications on the international order and security as 'constructed' by the realists – the dominant orthodoxy in international relations theory. Small weak states existed in Europe on the periphery of Carolingian Empire in the middle age while Greek city-state system was famously war-prone and so was the case with small Chinese states during the 'warring state period' of 403-221 BC. In contemporary literature, Joel Migdal arguably introduced the term 'weak states' while Jackson offered a more controversial concept of 'quasi-states'. Indeed, weak states have always been part of international system. Such states were the 'proxies' and 'battlegrounds' during the Cold War and considered irrelevant and peripheral in the realist worldview. However, in recent times,

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juridical' weak states with 'negative sovereignty'. Mark Duffield terms it as 'contingent sovereignty'. See Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of People*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, Chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> See Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, USA: Cornell University Press, 2004, pp. 93-105; Ashraf Ghani, and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Richard Hass, "Sovereignty: Existing Rights, Evolving Responsibilities", Remarks to the School of Foreign Service and the Mortara Centre for International Studies, Georgetown University, 14 January 2010, available at <http://www.state.gov/s/p/rem/2003/16648.html>, accessed on 14 May 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Realism has many strands. In structural realism, states are 'security seekers' and in motivational realism states are essentially 'greedy' (or a mixed motive state). This paper is based on the shared and dominant concepts of realist school of thoughts.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent review of the fragmented literature and current discourse of state weakness, see David Carment, Stewart Prest and Samy Yiyagadeesen, *Security, Development and the Fragile State: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Policy*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 6-10. Among others, Robert Rotberg (ed.) *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004, pp.14-25, provides a list of different weak, failed, failing and collapsed states and indicators of failure.

particularly after 9/11, the weak and collapsed states have become both referent and threat — perceived by many as the ‘single-most important problem for international order.’<sup>7</sup> Such perceptions postulate that the weak and failed states are fraught with ungoverned territory and are breeding grounds for international terrorism, organised crime, spread of pandemic diseases, etc. National security strategy papers of many countries view the inability of the weak and failed states to effectively govern their own territory or to work with their neighbours to ensure regional security as the greatest challenge to the regional stability and the international system.<sup>8</sup>

Contrasting such perceptions, many researchers have shown that the agenda of weak states relates more with the ‘crisis of (states’) capacity’ and ‘freedom from want’ as opposed to ‘crisis of authority’ grounded on ‘freedom from fear’ by the international community. Patrick Stewart, Susan Woodward and Edward Newman in their compelling findings report that there is no empirical basis of connecting international terrorism with weak and collapsed states.<sup>9</sup> The 2012 Global Terrorism Index also reveals that the top ten countries most affected by terrorism include a diverse mix of states ranging from Afghanistan, Somalia to India and Russia.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the hyped-up post 9/11 agenda of weak and collapsed states can be better understood and explained as a political construction. Indeed, such a misleading political construction has profound implications. First, it reduces the agenda of ‘state’ to ‘whether states are good or bad’ ignoring the fact that states are merely an instrument and defined by their means, not their ends. Second, it serves as a

<sup>7</sup> There is a growing literature depicting the nature and intensity of the threats emanating from weak and collapsed states. See Robert I. Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weaknesses in a Time of Terror*, Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2003; Robert I. Rotberg, “Failed States in a World of Terror”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2002; Jeffery Herbst, “Responding to State Failure in Africa” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1997, pp.120-144; Angel Rabasa, Steven Boraz, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Theodore W. Karasik, Jennifer D. P. Morony, Kevin A. O’Brian, John E. Peters, *Ungoverned Territories, Understanding and Reducing Terrorism Risks*, Santa Monica CA: Rand Corporation, 2007; and Liana Sun Wyler, *Weak and Failing States: Evolving Security Threats and U.S. Policy*, CRS Report to US Congress, 28 August 2008.

<sup>8</sup> See 2008 National Security Strategy of the USA, pp. 2-3; Australian Defence White Paper 2013, pp.18-25. Even small states like Singapore regard transnational terrorism originating from countries ‘embroiled in domestic unrest and civil strife’ as a national security threats. (Speech by Minister of Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at MINDEF Volunteers’ dinner at Marina Mandarin Hotel, 2012, available at [http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press\\_room/official\\_releases/sp/2012/16aug12\\_speech.html#.U6U50PmSyK8/](http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/sp/2012/16aug12_speech.html#.U6U50PmSyK8/), accessed on 17 Jun 2014.

<sup>9</sup> See Edward Newman, “Weak States, State Failure, and Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 19, 2007, pp. 463-88. Also see Patrick Stewart, “Weak States and Global Threats: Fact or Fiction?”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2006, pp.27–53; Patrick Stewart, “Weak States and Global Threats: Assessing Evidence of Spillover”, *Centre for Global Development*, Working Paper Number 73, 2006; Patrick Stewart, “Failed States and Global Security: Empirical Questions and Policy Dilemmas”, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 9, 2007, pp. 644–662; Patrick Stewart, “Why failed states shouldn’t be our biggest national security fear” *The Washington Post*, available at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-failed-states-shouldnt-be-our-biggest-national-security-fear/2011/04/11/AFqWmjKD\\_story.html/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-failed-states-shouldnt-be-our-biggest-national-security-fear/2011/04/11/AFqWmjKD_story.html/), accessed on 12 June 2014; Susan L. Woodward, “Fragile States: Exploring the Concept”, Paper presented to the “States and Security” Learning Group at the Peace and Social Justice Meeting of the Ford Foundation, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 29 November, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> See *Global Terrorism Index 2012*, Institute for Economics and Peace, 2012, pp. 28-29.

pretext and often justifies interventions (humanitarian or otherwise) by the powerful states. Third, in an era of aid selectivity and growing interdependence, it serves the donors with a reason to pick-and-choose countries that conform to their prescribed normative model of statehood (i.e., having liberal democracy, free market economy and specific institutional requirements etc.). Finally, more worrisome is the fact that it turns the international community's attention to 'freedom from fear' stream over the 'freedom from want' of the human security discourse. Such a shift of attention and resource allocation subdued the interest, development and welfare of the vast majority of world's population living in weak and collapsed states as they concentrate more on containing the 'security threats'. To de-construct this misleading political construction, it is essential first to examine the realist underpinning of state as the unitary rational actor and the antithesis of stateness represented by the weak and collapsed states.

## 2.2 State - The Unitary Rational Actor

The international system is based on Westphalian concept of 'state'—a territorially defined socio-political entity codified as internally sovereign and externally recognised by other states.<sup>11</sup> The fundamental similarity of modern states, albeit exceedingly varied in nature and types, includes the 'idea of state' together with its 'physical base' and the 'institutional expression'.<sup>12</sup> While the absence of institutional capacity due to the lack of 'despotic power' and/or 'infrastructural power' could result in state weakness, the absence of a domestic socio-political consensus can erode the less-tangible realm of 'the idea of state' making the state incapable or unwilling to fulfil its responsibilities of providing political good and maintaining territorial integrity and sovereignty. The fact that states are made up of governing institutions, leaders, interest groups and populations makes the realists' assumption of 'state' as a 'unitary actor' problematic. Yet, the realists find it 'analytically productive' and most 'sophisticated attempts to conceptualise the international system that have been restricted to the state-centric perspective'.<sup>13</sup> Sovereign state, as a unitary rational actor remains the key feature in international system and the supplier of 'political good' within its boundaries. Such 'political good' includes a stable and secure environment to its citizens through enacting binding legislation and exercising coercive force over sovereign territory to maintain law and order. Internally, states derive their legitimacy through public loyalty in exchange of the social contract and the demonstrated capability and willingness to mobilise and employ state resources towards productive

<sup>11</sup> Pluralists attempted to dispense the idea of 'state' while analysing 'politics' and state was characterised as a 'metaphysical spook' leading to analysing international relations from a non-state centric perspective. However, the advantage of state over other political entities in mobilising and organising resources 'has inherently linked politics with state, making the political system little more than a synonym for the state'. See Buzan, *op cit.*, 1991, p. 61, David Easton, *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1953 and Migdal, 1988, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Buzan, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> Buzan and Little, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

end fulfilling the contract. 'Structurally', the summative function of state's authority, legitimacy and service delivery capacity determines its strength/weakness while 'relationally' the intensity and degree at which 'the idea of state' can hold and bind the 'territorial-polity-society package' defines the strength, character and power of a state in the international system.<sup>14</sup> The dynamic continuum of state weakness and the fact that all states can be weak in some aspects or the other make it problematic to conceptualise state weakness in precise terms.

### 2.3 Conceptualising State Weakness: Antithesis of 'Stateness'?

There is no universally agreed definition of weak and collapsed states. The division amongst the scholars originates from the epistemological grounds as they find it difficult to objectively define and analyse the concept with methodological rigour. The concept is also viewed as politicised, ethnocentric, and hegemonic with interventionist connotations.<sup>15</sup> It has been further disjointed as a range of terminologies are used to denote state weakness.<sup>16</sup> Navigating through such overlapping contours and badly fragmented literature, it emerged that state failure may occur in four stages: weak, failing, failed, and collapsed (see figure 1).<sup>17</sup> Thus, the terms 'weak and collapsed states' used in this paper are generic within which one might find various stages of state weakness. Weak states – first in the league, are defined as those "where the ability to provide adequate amount of political good is diminished or is diminishing".<sup>18</sup> Collapsed states – the extreme version of state weakness and the last in the league, exhibit a vacuum of authority, "reducing the state as a mere geographic expression" where the structure, legitimate authority, law, and political order have fallen apart and security is obtained through the rule of the strong and the 'citizens' become mere 'inhabitants'.<sup>19</sup> Collapsed states exhibit *institutional failure* as opposed to functional failure. For example, Rwanda during the genocide in 1994 is argued to have 'failed' not 'collapsed' because it was the highly disciplined agents of the state that carried out and persuaded the task of murdering many of its people with hideous efficiency; the state institution was there, but it was just doing the opposite of what it was expected to do.<sup>20</sup> However, cases of state collapse involving extreme disintegration of public

<sup>14</sup> While it is possible to measure 'stateness' from a 'structural' approach alone, the 'relational' approach is important as it encapsulates state-society relationship, regional and international pressures, political economy and the interdependence engendered by globalisation, Crament *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> See Edward Newman, "Failed States and International Order Constructing a Post-Westphalian World", *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2009, pp. 421-443.

<sup>16</sup> Crament *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.8 list over 35 such terms ranging from 'anaemic state' to "neo-trusteeship".

<sup>17</sup> Although the State Failure Task Force Report uses an absolute transition approach (i.e. stable states disintegrating into a failed state) most researchers conform to the *process approach* where state failure is gradual. See Tiffany O Howard, *The Tragedy of Failure Evaluating State Failure and Its Impact on the Spread of Refugees, Terrorism and War*, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010, pp. 10-15.

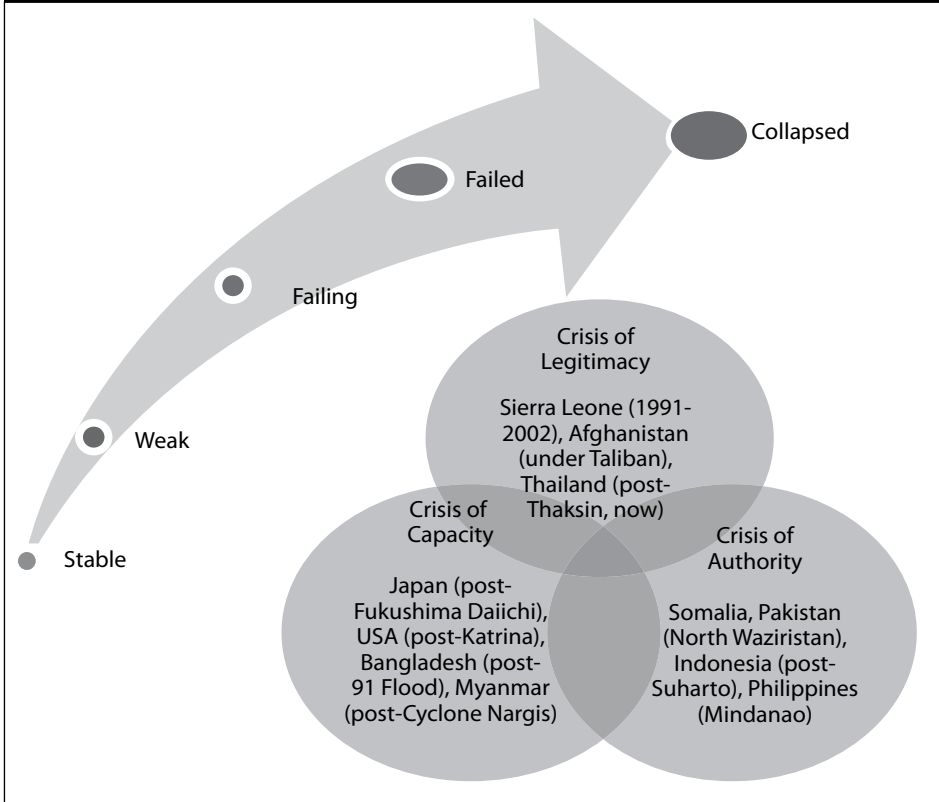
<sup>18</sup> Rotberg, 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> See, *Ibid*, p. 9 and I. W. Zartman, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Boulder: Lynne Publisher, 1995, pp. 1-5.

<sup>20</sup> See Christopher Clapham, "The Challenge to the State in a Globalized World", *Development and Change*, Vol. 33, No. 5, 2002, pp. 776.

authority is relatively rare.<sup>21</sup> Milliken and Krause cited Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Congo/Zaire and Albania as examples of collapsed states while Rotberg adds Sudan to the list.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 1: Conceptualising Weak and Collapsed States



Source: Author

Between the weak and collapsed stages of state failure lie the failing and failed states. Failed states, though a much more uncertain concept, as it ‘begs the question of what the core functions of states actually are’,<sup>23</sup> exhibit flawed institutions, deteriorating or destroyed infrastructure, loss of authority in large section of territory etc. What is perhaps more fundamental is the fact that the crisis of authority, legitimacy and capacity lies at the centre of any conceptualisation and measurement of state weakness (figure 1). Such crises may exist or occur in any state. For example, Japan’s ‘capacity crisis’ to cope with the post Fukushima – Daiichi disaster relegated

<sup>21</sup> J. Milliken and K. Krause, “State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies”, *Development and Change*, Vol. 33, No. 5, 2002, pp. 753-774.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 754 and Rotberg, 2004, *op cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> Clapham, *op. cit.*, p. 755.

its position in the 2012 Failed State Index.<sup>24</sup> The US and Myanmar looked similar in the face of Hurricane Katrina/Nargis. Again the ‘crisis of legitimacy’ haunts Thailand and Egypt in recent times while the ‘crisis of authority’ has often portrayed countries like Pakistan, the Philippines, and Nigeria as weak state. Weak states, however, do not mean *weak power*, a distinction more relevant to realist school of thoughts. Weak powers like Singapore, Austria, the Netherlands, and Norway are all strong states; conversely, weak states like Pakistan, Nigeria, and Indonesia are strong sub-regional power. All these contextual and conceptual understandings equip us to examine the realist worldview and situate weak and collapsed states agenda in proper perspective.

### 3. Realist Worldview and Weak States

#### 3.1 Basic Tenets of Realism

The basic tenet that lies at the heart of the realist worldview is heavily conditioned by *power realities*. Realists argue that in a world where war cannot be ruled out if conflicts are not settled peacefully, rational states are bound to be concerned with the structure of power in the sense not just of the distribution of military capabilities both actual and potential, but also of the whole web of relationships that would affect what would happen if war actually broke out. Table 1 lists the units, system structure, process and leading norms that shape the normative and political preferences of the realist school of thoughts. Realism, and structural realism in particular, regard the international system as ‘anarchic’ (i.e., absence of any supranational authority) where ‘state’ seeks power and calculates its interests in terms of power. It is this linking of power and the national interest which allow realists to explain national policies and international outcomes.

Paradigm	Units	System Structure	Process	Leading Norms
	- States	Anarchy	- Security Dilemma	- National Interest
Realism	- Nations		- Struggle for Power	- Security
	- IGOs			- Autonomy
				- Balance of Power
				- Rationality

Source: Barry Buzan, “The Timeless Wisdom of Realism?” in Smith K Booth and M. Zalewski, *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> The incident overwhelmed the government, undermining Japan’s ability to adequately respond to natural disaster and its effects. See, *Failed State Index 2012*, Washington D.C: Fund for Peace, p. 13.

The concern for power is what puts states at odds with each other as anarchy breeds competition and conflicts — ‘the twin facts of life’.<sup>25</sup> As Waltz opines, “states in an anarchic order must provide for their own security and threats or seeming threats for their security abound. Preoccupation of identifying danger and counteracting them become a way of life.”<sup>26</sup> Such security dilemma in the international arena exists irrespective of the innate lust of power by the state as all parties look for security. Thus, the structure of international system forces states ‘to act aggressively to each other’ and the states try to offset others’ power advantage either by ‘balancing’ or ‘bandwagoning’ creating the balance of power that shapes the international order.<sup>27</sup> Balancing could be internal where state concentrates on building strong economy, military etc. or external where state forms alliance with others to draw on resources. In balancing alliance, a state joins the weaker side to offset the power advantage of other states while in bandwagoning, the opposite is true. But how do these tenets of realism manifest in the weak and collapsed states?

### 3.2 Nature of Weak States’ (in)Security Dilemma

The anarchy and power interactions in weak and collapsed states are *internally oriented* with marginal relevance to realist assumptions and the Westphalian system on which it is enshrined. First, as opposed to external context, weak states’ (in)security dilemma originates from *within* and is often fraught with complex internal and external constraints. For example, apart from the role of Revolutionary United Front (financed by the Liberian leader Charles Taylor) the creation of *sobel* (soldiers by day and rebels by night) during the civil war in Sierra Leone owes much to such complex interplay of security dilemma where the financially pressed government had to not only trim one third of state employees but also engage the armed soldiers in “Operation Pay Yourself.”<sup>28</sup> The coinciding economic interest and incentives of the Sierra Leone’s military and the rebels under a ‘regional conflict complex’ and ‘opportunity structure’

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Waltz, one of the founding proponents of structural realism arguably transformed the realist theory, shifting the focus of explanation towards the international environment that states’ face and away from the states themselves. See, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press; K. N Waltz, “The New World Order”, *Millennium*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1993, pp. 187-195; “Structural Realism after the Cold War”, *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Summer 2000, pp. 5-41; “The Origin of War in Neorealist Theory”, in R. I. Rotberg and T. K. Robb (eds.), *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. For a detailed understanding of the various strands of realism, see, Alan Collins, (ed.), *Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp.16-31. For a more nuanced picture about the problem of international order and how to think about it, see, Trachtenberg Marc, *The Cold War and After History, Theory and the Logic of International Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 44-67. Also see, Stephen Van Evera, “The Hard Realities of International Politics”, *Boston Review*, 17, November–December 1992, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Waltz, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: Norton, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> See Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper and Goodhand Jonathan, *War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2004, p. 100; William Reno, “Shadow States and the Political Economy of Civil Wars” in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone (eds.), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil War*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2000, p. 50.



arguably prolonged the war.<sup>29</sup> One could argue that the domestic anarchy in weak and collapsed states mirrors the realist perception of 'security dilemma' in international system. Such comparison, however, is problematic as the 'interstate anarchy' is an essential defining condition and attributed to the international structure in which the state must learn to live, while it does not have same *priori status* within the state.<sup>30</sup> Anarchy within state may disappear once the state gains adequate authority to enforce the rule of law as happened in Sierra Leone once the government with the assistance of United Nation peacekeeping mission succeeded in gaining effective control and legitimacy while the same is *not* true in international environment. Indeed, the so called "Third World" countries like Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea could successfully graduate from such domestic (in)securities and be integrated into global system and now are very much responsible international players.

Second, realists' account of security dilemma sharply contradicts the distinctive predatory nature, privatisation of violence, etc. that characterise the civil wars and conflicts endemic in weak and collapsed states. Indeed the sub-state and non-state actors operating in such weak and collapsed environment create a 'defection from below' as opposed to the 'defection from above' by individual states or alliance challenging the traditional norm of security dilemma.<sup>31</sup> Such defection from below driven by greed and/or grievance motives and devoid of any responsible and rational relationship with the state and international system is often aimed at resource predation and violence.<sup>32</sup> In international arena 'security dilemma' requires a responsive relationship while 'predation' involves only the action of an aggressor and an unwilling victim. In security dilemma, all actors prefer peace but feel insecure about the intention of their rivals, while the basis of predation is often greed and lust.

Third, the self perpetuating nature of (in)security dilemma in weak and collapsed states oriented towards the *regime or elites' security* distorts the idea of national security interest. Owing to its fundamental structure and process of incomplete statehood and constraining external conditions, the idea of national security and interests severely lacks pragmatism and long term vision. As opposed to protecting the states from outside threats, the concept of national security transforms

<sup>29</sup> For an excellent account of the economic network of regional conflict complex, see, Pugh *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-28; for the 'opportunity structure' in civil wars, see, Karen Ballentine, "Beyond Greed and Grievance: Reconsidering the Economic Dynamics of Armed Conflict" in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman (eds.), *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2003, pp. 264-268.

<sup>30</sup> See Nelson Kasfir, "Domestic Anarchy, Security Dilemmas and Violent Predation Causes and Failure" in Rotberg, 2004, *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> See Philip G. Cerny, "The New Security Dilemma: divisibility, defection and disorder in the global era" in *Review of International Studies*, No. 26, 2000, pp. 623-646. Philip contends that security dilemma has always been challenged from below and above. However, the 'defection from below' has gain new momentum in an era of globalisation. He argues that this may in turn reduce the effectiveness of traditional state-based and state-systemic approaches in the stabilisation of international politics.

<sup>32</sup> See Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War", *The Centre for the Study of African Economies Working Paper Series*, 2002-01. Also Tobias Debiel and Axel Klein, *Fragile Peace: State Failure, Violence and Development in Crisis Regions*, London: Zed Books, 2002.

into regime protection and the state interest becomes ambiguous and confused.<sup>33</sup> Such fusion of 'state' and 'regime', resulting into a distorted notion of national security interests defies the realists' notion of state being a rational actor pursuing national interests. Criminalisation of state, endemic corruption, predation, rent seeking by the elites and powerful etc. undermine government's legitimacy and transforms it 'into the prize of political competition'.<sup>34</sup> States with such traits can hardly be regarded a rational actor and the 'highest form of human collective'.

### 3.3 Balance of Power and Weak States

Insofar as the balancing and bandwagoning are concerned – two basic options for the states to achieve balance of power in international system — the case of weak and collapsed states display a rather tenuous link and marginal relevance. Traditionally, strong and strategically important rising states are better poised for the power politics in international system while the fear of what war might bring often holds back the weak states from active balancing and bandwagoning exercise. Yet, it is the weak and collapsed states that are mostly riddled with endemic conflicts and civil wars. Such behaviours need to be understood by deconstructing the actors involved. In weak and collapsed states, primarily it is not the 'state' that defects from interstate balances of power, but rather a range of *transnational and sub national actors* operating in the power vacuum of such state that defy the traditional notion of balance of power theory. The traditional means of re-equilibrating the balance is often insufficient and of marginal relevance to integrate these actors, as they are not recognised in the current international system.

Again, the *power vacuum* in weak states draws various external and internal political and economic forces, international crime syndicates, non-state actors, organised crime, shadow economic activities and war entrepreneurs, triggering rebellion and civil wars. Dispensing the balance of power considerations, '*doing well out of war*' is what matters for these war entrepreneur in weak states' context.<sup>35</sup> Such endemic trend has prompted (humanitarian) interventions and securitisation of underdevelopment<sup>36</sup> and a refocus of the developed countries' national security strategy to address threats from weak and failed states. 'In the past, most violent

<sup>33</sup> Allan Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>34</sup> See Phil Williams and John T. Picarelli, "Combating Organized Crime in Armed Conflict", in Ballentine Karen and Nitzschke Heiko (eds.), *Profiting from Peace: Managing the Resource Dimension of Civil War*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2005, p. 127.

<sup>35</sup> As Collier *et al.*, assert, 'rebellion (in civil war) is motivated by greed, so that it occurs when rebels *can do well out of war*. On the power seeking variant of the predation theory, rebels are motivated by a lust for power, but rebellion occurs only when rebels *can do well out of war*. On the subjective grievance variant of the predation theory, rebels are motivated by grievances, imagined or real, but rebellion occurs only when rebels *can do well out of war*.' Collier Paul, Hoeffler Anke and Rohner Dominic, *Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War*, 2006, *Economics Series Working Papers*, WPS/2006-10, University of Oxford, UK.

<sup>36</sup> 'Securitisation' refers to the process by which issues are accorded security status or seen as a threat through political labelling, rather than as a result of their real or objective significance.

conflicts and significant threats to global security came from strong states' writes the United Kingdom National Security Strategy of 2008, 'currently, most of the major threats and risks emanate from failed or fragile states . . . They have the potential to destabilize the surrounding region.' While the developed world has stopped fighting, all 36 active armed conflicts recorded in 2009 were intra-state civil wars in the weak and collapsed states. Such an 'interventionist' focus on weak states has also been labelled as an attempt to 'extending West's external sovereign frontier'.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. Weak States in International System: Do they constitute a Critical Mass?

Having examined the discord of the realist school of thought in weak states' context, the next logical question is: do these weak and collapsed states constitute a critical mass to alter the realist view of international system? For some, the qualitative difference between the units of international system represented by the strong states in the Global North and the weak ones in the South arguably splits the international society into two camps — the West and the Rest. Others have contended that an inclusive world society does not yet exist and pictured the global architecture as a 'bifocal hierarchical international system' placing the secure, wealthy, developed liberal democracies at the top and the insecure, poor, weak states at the bottom.<sup>38</sup> Such characterisation together with the deepening and widening of security concepts has raised the issue of 'mutual vulnerability of weak and strong' making the weak state phenomenon a 'system responsibility'. Responding to such responsibilities, in 2005 over 150 countries adopted the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle later reaffirmed by the Security Council Resolution 1674 to reconcile the twin concerns of 'state' and 'human security'.<sup>39</sup> Notwithstanding the labelling of threats from the weak states as a post 9/11 *political constructions*, the securitisation of underdevelopment and humanitarian interventions under the R2P principles *can* mobilise exceptional resources and political powers allowing the weak and collapsed states to survive and even flourish (i.e., Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ghana etc.). Such mechanism reaffirms the resilience and continued relevance of realist worldview and confirms that the threats posed by weak and collapsed states are of marginal relevance to maintaining international political order.

Given the realists' assumption that international system is 'system-dominant' with independent structure that 'constraints the behaviour of states' also argues in favour of its continued relevance. First, the international system is still

<sup>37</sup> See Mark Duffield, *op. cit.*, p.213.

<sup>38</sup> See Alberto Martinelli, "Global Order or Divided World?", *Current Sociology*, March 2003, Vol. 51(2), pp. 95–100, London: SAGE Publications; Holm, Hans-Henrik og Sorensen, Georg (1995) *Whose World Order. Uneven Globalization and the End of the Cold War*, Boulder: Westview Press.

<sup>39</sup> As opposed to the ideas enshrined in article 2 (4) and 2 (7) of UN Charter that forbid the threat or use of force by states in their dealing with one another and prohibit UN from interfering in domestic affairs of its member states, the UNSC resolution 1674 sets out the responsibilities of states towards their citizen and the international community's responsibility 'in case states struggle or fail to meet their responsibilities'. See Collins, *op. cit.*, pp. 361-375.

populated by 'states' where 'territoriality' and claim of 'sovereignty' — contingent or otherwise — is still considered vital and suggests that balance of power and the prospect of anarchy and war has not diminished.<sup>40</sup> That is why, military alliance like North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) still finds its relevance and inspirations for putting up missile defence and enlargement in Europe<sup>41</sup> and the defence expenditure, production of sophisticated weaponry by the peaceful or rough states alike is on the rise.<sup>42</sup> Although the 'democratic peace' looks promising, Waltz's counter argument is that 'the (international) structure will remain anarchic even if all states became democratic'<sup>43</sup> and 'hierarchy' or 'anarchy' remains the most plausible options for international political system.<sup>44</sup> In reality though, there are evidences of hierarchy in an overwhelmingly anarchic international system. The hierarchy reinforces super ordinate-subordinate relations while the uneven distribution of power creates poles of power (i.e., uni-polar, bipolar and multi-polar). The recent annexation of Crimea by Russia and the continued instability in Ukraine, tensions in the South and East China sea, apprehensions about China with her rapid military modernisation, dispute between Japan and Russia over Kuril Islands, between Japan and China over Senkaku/Diaoyu, claim by half a dozen countries over all or some parts of the Spratly Islands, strategically located and supposedly rich in oil are some but few that epitomises the potential flash points of the future and are now contained through a regional/ global balance of power, reinforcing the realist worldview of the international system. Notably, none of these 'game changing' flash points that hold the potentials of sparking wars involving major powers is the creation of weak and collapsed states.

Global Trend 2030, published by UN National Intelligence Council also suggests that changing calculation of the *key player*, (i.e., US, China, India and Russia), together with increased resource contestations and a wide spectrum of more accessible instrument of war, will increase the likelihood of *interstate wars* which may involve nuclear deterrent.<sup>45</sup> Thus, despite the rhetoric and increasing appetite for (humanitarian) interventions by the powerful states to address security related issues in weak and collapsed states, the real challenge to the realist worldview still remains with the realm of geopolitics involving great and emerging powers where the weak states have marginal relevance.

<sup>40</sup> As Waltz puts it, "The natural state is the state of war. Under the conditions of international politics, war recurs; the sure way to abolish war, then, is to abolish international politics", 2000, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> See, Karl-Heinz Kamp, "NATO's 2014 Summit Agenda", available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede120214natosummitagenda\\_/sede120214natosummitagenda\\_en.pdf/](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede120214natosummitagenda_/sede120214natosummitagenda_en.pdf/), accessed on 08 July 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Global defence expenditure is on the rise again and is estimated to have been US\$ 1,339 billion in 2007, representing 45 per cent increase in real terms since 1998. See for details, Collins, 2010, pp. 395-396.

<sup>43</sup> Waltz also questions 'what type of democracy?' suggesting that '*illiberal democracies*' do tend to fight each other and the process of transition from autocracy to democracy is most certainly fraught with internal instabilities.

<sup>44</sup> Waltz, 2000, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>45</sup> See *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, National Intelligence Council, p. ii and p. 64, available at [www.dni.gov/nic/globaltrends](http://www.dni.gov/nic/globaltrends), accessed on 04 April 2014.

Second, as opposed to powerful strong states, the weak states do not have the power or the political influence to affect the international system not only because of its resilience but also because changes in the structure are distinct from changes at the unit level.<sup>46</sup> Buzan and Little go further suggesting that the international political structure has grown stronger and its effects have become pervasive. They contend that “under pressure from the (international) system, units (i.e., states) become structurally and functionally more alike. Those that fail to adapt disappear or are forcibly remade.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, state weakness, failure or collapse need not to be pre-ordained or terminal. States can graduate from one stage to the other. For example, Lebanon, Nigeria and Tajikistan graduated from collapsed to weak states while Afghanistan and Sierra Leone graduated from collapsed to failure.<sup>48</sup> Weak and collapsed states in current international system are also balancing their survival drawing alliance under the umbrella of War on Terror. Countries like Pakistan, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan etc. mirror such alliance with the United States. Some weak states in Africa have also formed regional alliance like Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and South African Development Communities that have successfully intervened in regional conflicts to ensure the security of their people. More importantly, the United Nations peacekeeping forces are ever more engaged today in building peace and ensuring security in many weak, failed and collapsed states with mixed success.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The distinctive self perpetuating insecurity dilemma, blurred concept of national security and interest — transformed into regime protection and elite security — as observed in weak and collapsed states present a counter-dynamic to the notion of a modern state. However, weak states have always been part of international system. But they never constituted a critical mass challenging the realist orthodoxy in international security and order. The current discourse and portrayal of the weak and collapsed states are better explained and understood as a misleading post 9/11 *political construction*. The antithesis of ‘stateness’ represented by weak and collapsed states and the creeping sovereignty gap might be changing the nature of the state, but their survival and functioning as the basic unit of an international system is hardly in question. Thus, despite adverse political construction and perception, in reality, weak and collapsed states — under the pressure of a resilient international system — continue to zigzag their way through the complicated democratisation process albeit sparking instability and chaos in

<sup>46</sup> Some have even argued that the fall of Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War is also insufficient to falsify the realist account of international order. They argue that it was a mere ‘single data point’ and the fact that the ‘defender’ exhausted in the struggle argues well for the continued relevance of the realist account. See William Wohlforth, “Realism and the End of the Cold War”, *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Winter 1994/95, pp. 91-129.

<sup>47</sup> Buzan and Little, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

<sup>48</sup> See Rotberg, 2004, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-68.

some parts of the world. Indeed, the growing interdependence of the international community, the theory of mutual vulnerability of weak and strong and the R2P principles underline the fact that both weak and strong states will have to 'swim together' while some will be ahead but none should be drowned.