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REFLECTIONS ON WEAK STATES AND OTHER SOURCES OF INTERNATIONAL (IN)STABILITY

The concept of international stability is probably one of the most widely used concepts in the self-determination discourse, especially after the end of the Cold War. The principle of territorial integrity of states, the restrictive interpretation of self-determination, and the extreme caution in recognizing new self-determination claims following Cold War's demise, have cumulatively been justified by an appeal to the values of international peace and the stability of international order. However, the concept under discussion is not related to self-determination issues only. It is wider in scope and far more complex in content than it appears at first sight. The concept of international stability should not only be seen as a result of the self-interest and power politics pursued by states in their mutual relationships. In the era of interdependence and globalisation that we live in, other principles and values, norms and institutions certainly influence the interstate relationships, no matter how confusing these principles, values, norms and institutions might be. At the same time, there are other sources of international (in)stability, in addition to those focusing on the state-as-actor component. These are the issues that we deal with in the following paragraphs. We start our elaboration in order to answer two general questions: 1) what is international stability and 2) what are the sources of international (in)stability?

In International Relations literature a clear cut definition of the concept of international stability per se is not given. Its definition is contrived from the analyses and observations made by scholars

as to the nature of the international system (bipolarity vs. multipolarity); the means or institutions designed for the management of power relations within the international system (balance of power, hegemony, collective security, world government, peacekeeping and peacemaking, war, international law and diplomacy); finally, the analyses and observations concerning the very nature of international actors, e.g. states (democracies vs. non-democracies).

When defined, though, the concept of international stability in its essence captures the main features of either the international system or of its components. In both cases, the definition of the concept focuses on the state-as-actor unit, rational in its actions, thus excluding other non-state entities from this conceptualisation. These non-state actors, such as national or religious groups, terrorist organizations, etc., may as well be incorporated into the definition of the concept.

Of the definitions focusing on a state-as-actor, those offered by Karl Deutsch and J. David Singer, are singled out as the most important. Although probabilistic in its nature, this definition purports to take as a vantage point both the total system and the individual states comprising it. From the broader, or systemic, point of view, these authors define stability as "the probability that the system retains all of its essential characteristics; that no single nation becomes dominant; that most of its members continue to survive; and that large-scale war does not occur". And, according to these authors, from the more limited perspective of the individual actors, stability refers to the "probability of their continued political independence and territorial integrity without any significant probability of becoming engaged in a war for

survival".[1] This conceptualisation of international stability does not account for non-state entities, whose actions are not taken into account as a potential source of international instability. After the end of the Cold War, these non-state entities proved to be a huge source of instability not only in interstate relations but also in the relations and affairs that develop within sovereign states. These non-state factors were at the end one of the major causes of the collapse of former Communist federations (Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia). The ethnic claims for self-determination triggered by the rising nationalism in the post-Cold War era threatened and continue to threaten the regional and wider stability, this being admitted by liberal[2] and realist[3] scholars alike. The case of former Yugoslavia is a metaphor for the new international system, that is, a system which is more turbulent and anarchic at present than ever before during the recent history.[4] This is not to say that the international system of the Cold War period was not anarchic. It did not have an overreaching supranational authority entrusted with securing order and stability in the system. However, it did have some relative stability and the mechanism to maintain this state of affairs, which rested with the two superpowers who took on the role of disciplinarian within their own blocks (or spheres of influence). With the collapse of this system, new logic of anarchy ushered in focusing not only on interstate relations but also on the internal dynamics of the existing

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[1] **Karl W. Deutsch**, **J. David Singer**, Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability, 16 World Politics (1964), Number 3, pp. 390-406 at pp. 390-391.

[2] cf: **Stephen Van Evera**, Primed for Peace: Europe after the Cold War, 15 International Security(1999/91), Number 3, pp. 7-57.

[3] cf: **John J. Mearsheimer**, Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War, 15 International Security(1990), Number 1, pp. 5-56.

[4] A thorough analysis of the Yugoslav case in the above sense can be found in: **Richard H. Ullman**, The Wars in Yugoslavia and the International System after the Cold War, in: Richard H. Ullman (ed.), The World and Yugoslavia's Wars (1998), Chapter 2.

sovereign states. With the demise of the Warsaw Pact, NATO's new role in relation to international security changed accordingly. This new role of NATO had to be formally accepted in the light of new changes in the structure of the international system. Thus, meeting in Rome in November 1991, the alliance's heads of state and government adopted what they called NATO's "new strategic concept". The danger the alliance faced was no longer "calculated aggression" from Moscow but "instabilities that may arise from the serious economic, social and political difficulties, including ethnic rivalries and territorial disputes, which are faced by many countries in Central and Eastern Europe".[5]

The initial debate regarding the international stability focused on the international system and its structure. Some scholars asserted that the multipolar world was less stable compared to that composed only of two powers (bipolarity).[6] In this debate, some other scholars denied the existence of bipolarity and multipolarity in international politics.[7] Some others saw the nuclear deterrent as

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[5]   cf: See, **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**, NATO Handbook (1993), Appendix II, "The Alliance's Strategic Concept Agreed by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Rome on 7th and 8th November 1991".

[6]   For more on this debate, cf: **Karl Deutsch**, **J. David Singer**, *supra* fn 1; **Hans Morgenthau**, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, 4th ed. (1966); **Richard Rosecrance**, Bipolarity, Multipolarity and the Future, 10 Journal of Conflict Resolution (1966), pp. 314-327; **Kenneth N. Waltz**, Theory of International Politics (1979) ; **John Lewis Gaddis**, The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar System, 10 International Security (1986) pp. 99-192.

[7]   Thus, R. Harrison Wagner proposes distinction between the tight power distribution of the Cold War and the loose distribution following it. cf: **R. Harrison Wagner**, What Was Bipolarity, 47 International Organisation (1993), Number 1, pp. 77-106.

the main source of international stability, ignoring the role of the structure of the system itself.[8]

Empirical evidence relied upon by these scholars belongs mainly to the pre-World War II period. This evidence is put foreword both to support and oppose the distribution of capabilities (bipolarity and multipolarity) as the sources of international stability in K. Waltz's terms. The debate was heated in particular after the Cold War and was triggered by John Mearsheimer's famous article Back to the Future[9].

Scholarly works examine various means and institutions designed for power management in international politics. They are ranked and classified, according to their order of importance in different ways. They mostly relate to the following concepts: balance of power, hegemony, collective security, world government, peacekeeping and peacemaking, war, international law and diplomacy.[10] Among these means and institutions, the balance of

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[8] **James M. Goldgeier**, **Michael McFaul**, A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era, 46 International Organisation (1992), Number 2, pp. 467-491. For the opposite view, cf: **Kenneth N. Waltz**, *supra* fn 6, pp.180-182.

[9] The crux of the issue in this article is that bleak future of humanity following the Cold War. Mearsheimer believed that the new system of multipolarity created after the Cold War would be more war-prone. He also believed that the stability of the past 45 years shall not be seen again in the decades to follow. Among the reasons for this, Mearsheimer included the hyper-nationalism, especially in Eastern Europe. cf: **John Mearsheimer**, *supra* fn 3, pp. 5-56.

[10] See more on this in **E.H. Carr**, The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919-1939. An Introduction to the Study of International Relations (1946); **Hedley Bull**, The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics (1977); **Inis L. Claude**, Swords Into Ploughshares: The problems and Progress of International Organization (1984); **Robert Gilpin**, War and Change in World Politics (1981); **Charles W. Kegley**, The Long Postwar Peace (1991); **Thomas J. Volgy**, **Lawrence E. Imwalle**, Hegemonic and Bipolar Perspectives on the New World Order, 39 American Journal of Political Science(1995), Number 4 pp. 819-834.

power takes the most prominent place in scholarly analysis as well as in interstate relations.[11] This is the reason why we devote our attention to the balance of power only, leaving aside the rest of the instruments and institutions.

The balance of power is a result of the activities of the state-as-unitary actor acting in an essentially anarchical environment. Although there are very few differences among the scholars as to the side effects of the balancing behaviour of states, such as that concerning the possibility of cooperation under the conditions of anarchy, most of the authors agree that the balances of power are formed systematically.[12]

As we saw, the second part of the definition of international stability focuses on the state, or the second level of analysis. From this perspective it is assumed that stability exists when states continue to preserve their political independence and territorial integrity without the need to pursue the struggle for survival. Is this definition, which we label a "classical" one, accurate enough to cover all forms of stability pertaining not only to the present but to

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[11] See more on the development and the history of the idea of balance of power, in: **Evan Luard**, The Balance of Power.The System of International Relations, 1648-1815 (1992), pp. 1-30.

[12] Hedley Bull, though, says that balances of power may come into being through conscious efforts and policies of one or all sides. **Hedley Bull**, *supra* fn 10, pp. 104-106. Among these types of the formed balances fall the Concert of Europe (1815-1919). This system of great power management of international affairs did achieve the greatest ever success in maintaining the stability in international affairs. There were wars among great powers during this time as well: Britain, France and Russia fought in the Crimea in 1854-1855 and Bismark went to war first with Austria and then with France to unify the German states in 1870-1871. Nevertheless, a certain amount of conflict may be accommodated and is accommodated by the international system without the system itself losing its overall stability. It is stability, at the end, mot conflict, that has been normal condition of the international system. cf: **Andreas Osiander**, The States System of Europe, 1640-1990. Peacemaking and the Conditions of International Stability (1994), pp. 3-4.

the Cold War era as well? In trying to give an answer to this, IR scholars have focused their attention on the internal dynamics of states and their social, political and economic fabric they are made of. This line of reasoning, by and large present during Cold War years, has produced a large amount of evidence and very useful theoretical insights, known as the "theory of democratic peace".

The main premise of this liberal view on international stability is that democracies are war-prone but that they do not go to war with each other.[13] In their mutual relationship, democratic states observe and externalise the democratic norms, rules and procedures as well as institutions which, in turn, prevent the recurrence of the logic of the balance of power and the security dilemma. The logic of anarchy and its consequences, say these authors, remain valid only among the undemocratic and authoritarian states that are, in some cases, named as the "outer concentric circles"[14], or the "periphery" of international society.[15] The "theory of democratic peace" is not confined to the interstate relations only.

Within this liberal view there has also emerged another stream of thought focusing on intra-state relations. The assumption, notes Kelvi Holsti, that the problem of war (conflict) is primarily a problem of relations between states has to be seriously questioned.[16] In essence this assumption was earlier questioned in scholarly work, in the studies regarding the phenomena of state-

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[13] More on this in: **Michael W. Doyle**, Liberalism and World Politics, 80 American Political Science Review (1986), pp. 1151-1169; **Joanne Gowa**, Democratic States and International Disputes, 49 International Organization (1995) Number 3, pp. 511-521; **John M. Owen**, How Liberalism Produces Peace, 19 International Security (1994), Number 2, pp. 87-125.

[14] **Barry Buzan**, From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School, 47 International Organization (1993), Number 3 pp. 327-352 at 349-352.

[15] **James M. Goldgeir**, **Michael McFaul**, *supra* fn 8.

[16] **Kalevi J. Holsti**, The State, War and the State of War (1996), p.15.

building of the nations that emerged from the process of decolonisation. As we shall see in the following chapter, these new states did not have to struggle for their survival in an anarchical society of states in order to secure and preserve their newly won independence and territorial integrity. Their political independence and territorial integrity were rather guaranteed and preserved by the same "anarchical" society. This was done through the norms on sovereign equality of states, fixed territorial borders and the so-called juridical statehood[17]. The international regime providing for these norms proved to be very stable in the long run and has favoured the political independence and territorial integrity of these states but to the detriment of political and economic development and the social cohesion of these countries.[18] The legitimacy of the ruling elite that took on the task of state-building following the end of decolonisation derived not from the will of those governed but from the norms on equality of states, fixed territorial borders and juridical statehood. These qualities, in essence, enshrined the collective will of the majority of the members of the international society.[19] However, as we shall argue later, any approach different from the one above mentioned, supporting former administrative (colonial) borders as a basis for international statehood, would have proved more destabilizing, especially had it been based on the ethnic principle.

The analysis of state building, both in theory and practice, in former colonies and its impact on international stability has further been extended to the new states that emerged after the collapse of Communist federations following the end of the Cold War. Long

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[17] cf the eloquent study by Robert H. Jackson: **Robert H. Jackson**, Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and Third World (1990).

[18] **Jean François Bayart**, The State in Africa: The Politics of Belly (1993), pp. 41-118.

[19] **I. William Zartman**, Collapsed States. The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority (1995), pp.1-11, 207-273.

before these new states emerged, the Communist federations had descended into anarchy and violence, imperilling their own citizens and threatening their neighbours through refugee flows, political instability, and random warfare. This second wave of the failed (collapsed or weak) states, whose very existence rested with the presence of juridical statehood in the international realm, produced the instability in the system (in one case even causing a serious rift among the great powers of the present-day international system : Kosova during NATO air campaign of March – June 1999). These types of states are associated with the resurgence of ethnic nationalism and the violence it produces.[20]

Ethnic nationalism, as a divisive and destabilizing force in international relations, has been treated with equal care as the state system itself. In fact, those who studied ethnic conflicts as a source of international instability have made a parallel between the behaviour of ethnic groups and the states. Barry R. Posen is among them. He states that ethnic (and other religious and cultural) groups enter into competition with each other, amassing more power than needed for security, and thus begin to threat others. The crux of this argument is that ethnic (and other religious and cultural) groups behave, upon the collapse of the previous state structures, in the same manner as do the sovereign states under the conditions of anarchy.[21] Nevertheless, as opposed to the previous wave of the

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[20] They are called that because of the weaknesses of the state institutions and the lack of political and social cohesion within these states. cf: **Gerard B. Helman**, **Steven R. Ratner**, Collapsing Into Anarchy, Current (1993) Number 353; **Lawrence Freedman**, Weak States and the West, 32 Society (1994), Number 1, at: http://www.epnet.com.

[21] cf: **Barry R. Posen**, The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict, 35 Survival (1996), Number 1, pp. 27-45. An identical view is expressed also by Markus Fischer, but regarding medieval times. This author says that the behaviour of communes, duchies, principalities and other actors of this period was more or less like the behaviour of modern states acting under the conditions of anarchy. cf. **Markus Fischer**, Feudal Europe, 800-1300: Communal

failed states, this time the role and the commitment (military and non-military) on the part of the international community, in terms of preserving the political independence and territorial integrity of its newly accepted members, is by far greater and more effective than in the past. As a sign of this role and commitment, the international community has added new norms and procedures concerning democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human and minority rights (apart from old ones regarding the sovereign equality of states, fixed territorial borders and juridical statehood). A qualitatively new meaning was attached to the territorial integrity of states that emerged from former Communist federations. In some cases, as in the Balkans, this new interpretation was brought to the foreground by the use of force, huge military deployments as well as economic and other assistance on the part of the international community. This was done in order to render meaningful the new concept of territorial integrity that should be seen in close connection with the internal political and economic infrastructure of these new countries. For this purpose, new institutional mechanisms and programs, such as the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, were set up. This means that the assumption of the "democratic peace" that liberal and democratic states are producers of peace and stability in the system is gaining weight and proving to be correct, in Europe at least.

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Discourse and Conflictual Practices, 46 International Organization (1992), Number 2, pp. 427-466.