UNDERSTANDING STATE FAILURES IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

Elmira Serikovna Taukebayeva[1]
Madiyar Ualievich Zhumabekov[1]
Berdiyar Baltabayevich Saparov[2]
Raimberdi Kudratulloyevich Khaytmetov[3]

[1]M. Auezov South-Kazakhstan University, Shymkent, Kazakhstan
[2]Tashkent State Agrarian University, Uzbekistan
[3]Chirchik State Pedagogical Institute, Uzbekistan

E-mails: elt_s@mail.ru, jumabek-777@mail.ru, berdiyarsaparov@mail.ru, r.xaytmetov@cspi.uz

ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the detailed consideration of the phenomenon of failed states in Central Asia as they represent a growing threat for international security and peace. Few of risks failed states can pose the rest of the world are terrorism, transnational crimes, weapons proliferation, massive refugee and migration flows, regional instability, and the spread of disease and epidemics. Central Asia is one such troubled region in the world with its member countries described as failed or failing states. Although, the truth is that different states fail in different ways, general solutions can be developed to tackle common state weaknesses in sovereignty, security, capacity and legitimacy.

Keywords: state failure, sovereignty, security, Central Asia, legitimacy.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty, hunger, terror, wars and conflicts make people flee in search of better and safer place for living. In an era of globalization and opening world, a state failing to meet its basic liabilities to provide stability, peace and economic sustainability for its own people undermines general security and welfare. The recent crisis in countries of the Arab and Middle East is a vivid example of growing interdependence and contagious instability when state fails. Millions of people are affected by the unrest not only in the regions of instability but worldwide.

According to Robert Rotberg, President of the World Peace Foundation, tragedy of state failure is horrific with human casualties of “about eight million people, most of them civilians, and displaced another four million. The number of those

impoverished, malnourished, and deprived of fundamental needs such as security, health care, and education has totaled in the hundreds of millions" [1].

The main reason for selecting to study concept of state failure is that weak and unstable states which are unable to control its people and territory pose increasing threat for common wellbeing of all countries. Indeed, state failure has a spillover effect leading to intensification of conflict and violence on the territory of neighboring countries and even further. Very often state failure has a regional dimension spreading to other countries and escalating overall instability. In addition, scale of the issue is really fearsome with the World Bank estimates that by 2030 up to two-thirds of the global extreme poor may be living in fragile and conflict-affected economies [2]. Therefore, tackling state failure and promotion of more effective governance is rationale necessity rather than humanitarian activity.

It is noteworthy that few of potent threats emanating from failed states are terrorism, transnational crimes, weapons proliferation, massive refugee and migration flows, regional instability, and the spread of disease and epidemics.

Central Asia is one such instable region in the world with its member countries characterized often as failed or failing states. Indeed, all of countries in the region - Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, are prone to instability and state weakness with low level of living standards, endemic corruption in society, incidents of social unrest, judicial ineffectiveness and low rule of law, political fragmentation and confrontation, deterioration of democracy and military interference in politics.

METHODOLOGY

General methodological principles were used for the study of failing states' risks in Central Asian region. This allowed conducting an objective study of this form of relations. They are the following: political and philosophical methods of cognition of reality, political methods of analyzing socio-political phenomena, as well as sociological, systemic, comparative, structural-functional and content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Why states in Central Asia are failing or failed while the region is rich in mineral, land and human resources? In the past it was prosperous place on the Great Silk Road with significant political and economical influence. Even today, the region represents important geo-strategic value both for global actors as neighboring Russia and China, and as distant actors as USA and the EU. However, according to the Fragile States Index 2019, all countries of Central Asia are of 'orange' and 'yellow' color states with

‘warning’ and ‘elevated warning’ level of instability [3]. Economic and political transformation of many of Central Asian states was not very smooth after the collapse of the USSR. On the path of their sovereignty many of them have suffered from internal instability due to political confrontation, civil wars, coup d’etats, regional clashes and humanitarian crisis. In terms of economic welfare, except Kazakhstan, almost all of states in the region are not self-sustainable and heavily dependent on external aid from international community.

State failure in Central Asia raises contested discussions among both academicians and politicians. On the one hand, Central Asia is instable region with its member countries characterized by incidents of instability and state weakness. All of five states in the region - Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - are prone to low level of living standards, endemic corruption in society, incidents of social unrest, judicial ineffectiveness and low rule of law, political fragmentation and confrontation, deterioration of democracy and military interference in politics. On another hand, the region is rich in minerals, hydrocarbons, land and human resources. In the past the region was very prosperous due to its role for trade via the Great Silk Road. Even today, the region represents important geo-strategic value both for global actors as neighboring Russia and China, and as distant actors as USA and the EU. Moreover, many states in the region reported as failing or failed are still functioning and existing as the state.

For understanding occurrence of state failure in countries of Central Asia we have made analysis of historical transformation of statehood in the region, i.e. state formation and transformation of its main conditions for stability or failure - sovereignty, legitimacy, security and capacity.

Sovereignty is important but newly acquired notion for countries of Central Asia. In classical version, sovereignty means “supreme authority within geographic area such as a territory” [4]. Thus, sovereignty per se is a political notion of power or authority. But many of countries in Central Asia were small, landlocked and vulnerable to external forces and never being fully able to exercise their sovereign power. Therefore, transformation of sovereignty in Central Asian countries is a little bit different from classical European evolution due to specific history, conditions and cultural mentality.

First of all, the notion of territorial inviolability and supremacy of the ruler in the sovereignty concept could not be fully applied to the region because of the semi-nomadic lifestyle of peoples inhabiting it. Even definition of regional composition varied in the past with no single definition universally accepted due to uncertainty of geographical borders.

It is noteworthy that idea of Central Asia as a separate region was proposed in 1843 by geographer Alexander von Humboldt. But final composition of the states in region was defined during and after the Soviet regime. Sovereignty or real independence of states in the region was established after delimitation of state borders, formulation of state legal provisions and formation of government with supremacy or jurisdiction over its subjects. In reality, it happened after collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991. According to political scholars Ibrasheva and Bokasheva, all countries in Central Asia were deprived of any autonomy and lost their sovereignty after signing of the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR in December 1922 [5]. Only after collapse of the USSR, countries in the region gained real sovereignty and till nowadays, they are zealous about any possible sharing or limitation of it.

Therefore, countries in Central Asia have only about 20 years of experience as sovereign states. They are still learning sovereignty of their country. Many of them have different attitudes towards perception of national sovereignty and possible toleration of foreign intervention.

At the same time, almost 70 years of Soviet experience have created strong legacy to influence on transformation of state performance, work of institutions, shift from command to market economy and political developments.

Transformation of legitimacy of power in the region is important for understanding specific conditions of state development. Legitimacy of states determines support from population to exercise power and coercion of citizens. In many states of Central Asia being as semi-authoritarian or poorly democratic, there is higher probability of unrests and protests by population. If gaining low support or found illegitimate, then states experience growing constraints in realization of governance functions due to opposition by population. As a result, states which fail to gather sufficient support can encounter incidence of disobedience, demonstration, protest, strike, unrest, coup d'etat and civil war. The higher frequency and larger scale of protests by population is in the state, the greater will be risk of instability and challenge of state legitimacy.

To start with, the region was not very peaceful place in the world and several of regional countries have already witnessed deficit of legitimacy of power since gaining their sovereignty. Among them were all republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan. Let's review them one by one.

Kyrgyzstan has experienced two coup d'etas since its independence in 2005 and 2010 in both cases making their presidents flee abroad. Corruption, decline of economic life, low efficiency of justice, increase of political persecution and criminalization of power have led to social unrests and lootings which even further exacerbated chaos and poor stability of Kyrgyzstan. According to Global Voice,

second ‘Tulip Revolution’ was furious and bloody with “almost 74 people dead and more than 500 wounded” [6].

Uzbekistan has experienced only one, but violent event in Andijan province on 13 May 2005. The ‘Andijan massacre’ has taken lives of somewhat of 1.500 people and many more have become refugees worldwide [7]. The Andijan unrest was provoked by allegations of unjust persecution of several business people accused of membership in religious extremist organization. The businessmen denied governmental charges by saying that they were arrested because of their growing support among the local population [8]. Today, Uzbekistan remains one of authoritarian states in the region.

Tadjikistan Civil War began in May 1992 and lasted for five years. It has started when local ethnic groups from few regions rose up against the government of president Rahmon Nabiyev. Politically, the discontented groups were represented by liberal democratic reformists and Islamists, which fought together and later self-organized under the banner of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). An armed insurgency of the opposition forces continued 34 to destabilize the country till June 1997. By the end of war, the official number of human casualties has reached 51.000 people [9].

Kazakhstan prides itself as the regional leader and stable country in Central Asia. But the labor unrest in town of Zhanaozen on December 16, 2011 has revealed deep-rooted problems in Kazakh society as lack of democracy, free media and accountability. More than 20 years ruling of president Nazarbayev and persecution of political opposition created frustration by population and international community. Demonstration of workers on the 20th anniversary of Kazakhstan independence ended with clashes between police and striking oil workers. CNN reported about “at least 14 people dead and 80 injured” [10]. It has become the Kazakstan’s first and strongest unrest since gaining independence in 1991. It has demonstrated that, at least, some part of population was left unattended by government and people start challenging credibility of the state.

Security is one of vital functions state obliges to provide to citizens. If failed or failing to provide it, the state runs the risk to challenge its capacity as the state. At the same time, the state is obliged to provide both internal and external security. Internal security means the order and protection of citizens from violence, enforcement of mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts without recourse to violence. External security implies safety of citizens from foreign intervention, territorial integrity and protection of economic interests. Due to small size, poor economic performance and limited political maturity, many of states were weak to guarantee security both internally and externally.

Although none of five states in Central Asia were attacked by foreign aggressor after the breakup of Soviet Union, there were many incidents of internal unrest with huge human casualties. Strong capacity of somewhat 225.300 active and 382.500 reserve military personnel in all five states of the region [11], was often used against own citizenry and opposition. Despite military capacity of states, there is internal vulnerability to the serious threat of Islamist radicalism in the region. According to Pasco, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations for Political Affairs, Central Asia can become "breeding grounds for religious extremism and ethnic conflict" [12] due failure to secure public welfare, employment, political dialogue and greater integration with the rest of the world.

Indeed, the region has seen emergence and arrival of numerous religious groups from abroad attracted by the power vacuum after the fall of the USSR. Today, none of states is immune against terrorism and radicalism. The most notable extremist movements and radical groups in the region are the Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Salafi movement, the Tabligi Jamaat, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Birdamlik, Akromiya and Bayat. Their scale of operation and depth of influence on populations in the region is very strong. For comparison, Hizb ut-Tahrir movement has already attracted more than 20.000 members in Central Asia with majority of them in Uzbek territories [13].

External vulnerability of countries in the region is in financial and political dependence on foreign dominant powers such as Russia, USA, Europe and China. Indeed, many Central Asian states have been receiving and continue to receive financial aid becoming even more dependent on external players. As an example, it is noteworthy that all of countries owe 45- 70% of their annual GDP to foreign countries. It means that some of them are very dependent on external countries to be able and protect fully national interests.

Capacity of state is one more condition for state stability and failure. It can be evaluated via level of corruption in society, state's ability to prevent forced human migration and provision of economic benefits to citizenry. Dissatisfaction by state capacity or inefficiency of state to provide public services due to corruption or any other reasons can lead to opposition of government by population and growth of emigration by people. Since the region has witnessed series of incidents of unrest and coup d'etas, it will be interesting to look in the subsequent part of the study and analyze current indicators of national GNI per capita, migration flows and corruption levels.

Economic development of newly independent states of Central Asia was not very smooth and stable. All five states have experienced Soviet legacy. In the past, all Soviet states were part of complex economic infrastructure where countries were interconnected with each other. Then, Central Asian states served mainly as raw

materials suppliers of the USSR. However, in many cases, the processing of Central Asia's raw materials was organized outside the region. It was the core idea of communists to make members of the Soviet Union interdependent and increase overall integrity of the system.

Another characteristic of Central Asian economic transformation was strong dependence on Moscow and ethnic Russians in a variety of governance spheres. Moscow used to subsidize local economies, and even after independence, Central Asian states were continuing to look for approval of Russia in many international decisions as a direct successor of the USSR. Russians used to occupy crucial government positions in many of states of the region. Moreover, they were predominantly working in science, technology, public management and administration of local military. Almost all communications and transportation networks in the region were oriented to Russia. This historical multifaceted Soviet legacy and dependence upon independent Russia is still applicable to many modern economies of Central Asia.

CONCLUSION

For many states in the region, gaining independence has revealed sad reality of mosaic infrastructure and strong dependence on neighbors. Twenty years of state formation demonstrated various potential of the countries in the region. Although the region is rich in mineral resources and human capital, many of countries in the region lack infrastructure and skills to profit from independent mining and production for national economies.

Even today, the region is largely operating as raw materials producing agrarian appendage of stronger economies like China, Russia and Europe. For example, the largest in population state of Uzbekistan is an agrarian republic mainly specialized in cotton production and sale through the Liverpool Cotton Exchange. The other main resource of Uzbekistan is natural gas and is sold to Russia and China, and, partially, in the region. Tadjikistan and Kyrgyzstan are the poorest agrarian countries of the region with high dependence on imports. Both of them are dependent on hydrocarbons, but they are rich in water resources. However, both landlocked states of Tadjikistan and Kyrgyzstan are dependent on neighbors to dare and make money by selling water. Therefore, in arid and agricultural region as Central Asia, water is not only source of life, but it is a source of current and future conflicts. In overall, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are in much better situation due to huge deposits of oil and gas. In addition, both of these states possess vast land resources.

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