Study of Causes and Findings of Ethnic Conflicts in South Asia

Iqtidar Karamat Cheema*

It was in 1953 that the tern ethnicity was first formally employed in social sciences to denote the character or quality of an ethnic group. The concept of ethnicity was advanced as a generic term covering tension and conflict arising out of cultural heterogeneity in a territorial state. In some sense, it was put forth as a replacement for class to conceptualize social stratification in society. Theories of ethnicity suggested interaction between cultural groups, vertically structured with their own ranking systems, as a more reliable measure of social behaviour than social class in post-industrial mass consumption societies.[1]

South Asia is a multiethnic, multi-religious and multilingual region. Unfortunately, this multiplicity has been responsible for unrest and conflict in the region both at societal and state level. This is because ethnic groups transcend six of the seven borders of South Asian states. Tamils live in northern Sri Lanka and southern India. Punjabis live on both sides of the Pakistan-India border. Bengalis live on both sides of the India-Bangladesh border. Although Sri Lankan Tamils are only 12.5 percent of the total population, the majority Sinhalese perceived Tamils as a threat to their existence. This is because 60 million Tamils live in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The phenomenon of double ethnicity is not only confined to the Sri Lankan case. Geography, history,

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* Iqtidar Karamat Cheema, Deputy Registrar, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

1 Ishtiaq Ahmed, *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Pinter, 1996), pp.19-20.

politics and more particularly, the resurgence of ethnicity and religion has complicated South Asian security.[2]

South Asia has a history of 15 ethnic conflicts in a span of five decades. India has witnessed eight, followed by three in Pakistan and one each in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Bhutan. Many conflicts have been driven by a desire for greater autonomy, which itself is an outcome of a fear of assimilation and marginalization and a sense of relative deprivation and powerlessness. At least three secessionist movements — East Pakistan, Khalistan and Tamil Eelam — originating from the mismanagement of autonomy demands, led to conflict escalation. A dozen ethnic conflicts have become big enough to be described as internal wars. Most have lingered on for a long while and led to large-scale human and material losses. The East Pakistan war is certainly the most disastrous civil war in the region, with the death toll crossing three million.[3] The death toll resulting from Tamil Elam was close to 60,000.[4]

Ethnic insurgencies in South Asian states have mostly been indigenous. They originated from within one or more states with post-colonial socio-cultural, economic and political heritage and often in reaction to the ill-conceived or misguided government policies.[5] A prominent feature of post-colonial nation-building attempts in South Asia has been directed almost exclusively in favour of creating a unified 'national identity' based around either common political values/citizenship or a putative majoritarian ethnic identity. The net effect of such a course of action has been far from satisfactory. Whenever state elites in the region attempted to ride roughshod over the rights and aspirations of the so-called peripheral minorities (religious, linguistic, regional, or other), the outcome has been either a violent partition/secession or the

2 Charles King, *Ending Civil Wars* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1997), p.9.

3 Frances Stewart and Taimur Hayat, 'Conflict in South Asia: prevalence cost and politics' in Khadija Haq (ed.), *The South Asian Challenge* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.112.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Michael Brown and Sumit Ganguly (eds.) *Government Policies and Ethnic Relations in Asia and Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), p.8.

emergence of ethno-nationalist movements attempting to achieve those ends.[6]

Most of the ethnic insurgencies in South Asia today are deeply entrenched, thereby augmenting the insurgents' capacity to engage the states in protracted, low-intensity wars of attrition, and greatly magnifying the threat posed to these states' territorial integrity and continued sovereign existence. Ethnic insurgents in South Asia have frequently been approached and received support from, foreign kinship groups and even other 'identity' groups engaged in similar struggles elsewhere with whom they shared common religion or ideology. Neighbouring ethnic groups, who are not co-nationals but are engaged in similar insurgent struggles, have also been approached for help by South Asian insurgents.

Ethnic insurgents have further sought help from neighbouring groups with whom they share a common ideology or religion.[7] Almost all the major ethnic groups in South Asia have at some time or other resorted to terrorist attacks. Usually lacking the resources needed for conventional military warfare, ethnic insurgents often resort to terrorism because it is cheaper but effective in creating an environment of terror, harder to detect and counter, leads to state reprisals and further polarization of civil society, and attracts good domestic and international publicity.

In the post-World War II period, South Asia experienced a plethora of ethnic-political movements and conflicts. The nature of ethnic demands raised through these movements and conflicts ranged from basic socio-economic and political rights to regional autonomy to outright secession and independence. Some of the more serious conflicts in these regions witnessed gross and wilful abuse of human rights, created large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), generated complex political and humanitarian emergencies, and bogged down the states' security apparatus in some of the most protracted and intractable insurgency-counter insurgency warfare. Even though the particular feature and specifics of each case of conflict differed significantly

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6 Urmila Phadnis and Rajat Ganguly, *Ethnicity and National-building in South Asia* (New Delhi: Publications, 2001), pp.14-15.

7 Rajat Ganguly, *Kin State intervention in Ethnic Conflicts: Lessons From South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, l998), p.50.

from other cases, they would throw up one common theme. That is, ethnic insurgencies and secessionism, in their ultimate analysis, often stemmed from the post-colonial nation-building strategies which eventually brought about and legitimized the over-centralization of state power.

Such a preponderance of colonial state power mainly came from the obsession of the post-colonial political elites in South Asia who wanted to produce a pulverized and uniform sense of national identity at all costs. This could be forged by either invoking the concepts of the 'political nation' or assimilating and acculturating minority ethnic identities into the culture of the majority or dominant community. However, the attempt to forge a uniform national identity generated an 'ethnic backlash' which in turn posed legitimate security risks for the state. The very process of national integration in South Asia, by over-centralizing power and encouraging policies of assimilation, provided the stimulus for ethnic insurgent and secessionist movements. Hence, conflict resolution strategies should take into account this fundamental reality and respond to ethnic aspirations and movements. They should recognize the need to grant ethnic groups greater autonomy in their own affairs. Critics suggest that the best chance to halt hostilities, with or without external third party intervention, is when a conflict is 'ripe'. In other words, the prospects for peace are at their brightest when a conflict is at a stage of 'hurting stalemate' where adversaries are exhausted and have come to believe that little can be gained by further prolonging and escalating the conflict.[8]

Likewise, modernization paradigm assumed that in multiethnic developing states democratic consolidation, improvements in communications and transportation, and increasing industrialization and urbanization would collectively engender the political and economic integration of minority ethnic groups within the national mainstream. This would, in turn, create a common civic identity by uniting all inhabitants of the state, and eliminate the possibilities of ethnic conflict. When, defying expectations, ethnic insurgencies and secessionist conflicts broke

8 D.G. Pruitt and J.Z Rubin, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate and Settlement* (New York: Random House, 1986), p.51.

out in several Asian states, the modernization paradigm viewed them either as epiphenomena (for instance, dependency and neo-Marxist theories of class conflict) or as anachronisms resulting from a temporary breakdown of the nation-building process (for instance, Western liberalism's view of ethnic nationalism as an irrational and dangerous sentiment).

Moreover, operating within the Cold War environment, which prevailed prominently in Asia, the Asian political analysts of both Liberal and Marxist ideological persuasions tended to focus more on such issues as the East-West and North-South disputes, inter-state war, weapons proliferation and disarmament, revolutions and liberation movements, and the expansion of the global economy. They considered such complex issues to be far more important for the long term stability and security of the Asian states, rather than the issues like ethnic identity, secessionist movements, and refugee and migration flows.

Most secessionist movements in South Asia were complex, protracted and violent (with at least one inviting the possibility of nuclear confrontation). The complexity with which many players, both state and non-state, internal and external, were involved in these conflicts on an ongoing basis made these situations inherently less manageable. An increase in the number of stakeholders in any conflict means that resolution and the negotiated solution upon which a lasting settlement depends, are more difficult to obtain. Second, the transnational character, geographic location and demographic distribution of seceding ethnic populations indicate that most secessionist movements in South Asia have the potential to 'spill over' — either through refugee flows or direct state to state confrontation. Theoretically, when a state loses its ability to regulate and control an internal ethnic conflict, the problem becomes a regional security dilemma because that weakness invites external intervention. From this perspective, ethnic conflict creates security problems; possible interventions by certain states because of the advantage that could be obtained by exploiting ethnic divisions in neighbouring states (such as India's intervention in Sri Lanka and Pakistan's involvement in the Kashmir conflict).

In order to understand why some of South Asia's secessionist ethnic conflicts became protracted regional affairs, it is, perhaps, best to begin with a better understanding of the term 'secession'. Secession is a distinct and specific kind of ethnic-based political mobilization. The term secession is most often used to refer to a declaration of intent by a minority to pursue independence. As Heraclides points out, secession includes: (a) degree of in-group legitimation that endorses the aims and means of the conflict; (b) credible military threat, and (c) support from external states.[9]

Wood regards 'secession' as 'a more precise term than separatism because it refers to a demand of formal withdrawal by a member unit (or units) from a central authority on the basis of claims to independent, sovereign status.'[10]

Separatism, by contrast, covers all aspects of political alienation that include a desire for reduction of control by a central authority. By this standard, all secessionist conflicts start out as separatist conflicts even though the intent of some separatist movements may be to unite with another independent state rather than be independent as in the case of some Kashmiri (irredentist groups) while others may proceed to full secessionist campaigns (e.g., the Tamil United Liberation Front in Sri Lanka). Heraclides' evaluation highlights three characteristics of violent separatist conflict, each of which is to be found in the case studies.

First, it is important to note that all separatist wars have occurred in settings where power is highly centralized and democracy is weak or non-existent. Second, there are outside partisan actors in those instances where secession is pursued through violence.

However, the regional and interstate context of secessionist conflict is equally evident, especially in conflicts that are violent.[11] For example, when ethnic groups refuse to recognize the political

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9 Alexis Heraclides, *The Self-determination of Minorities in International Politics* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1991), p.344.

10 John Wood, "Separatist: A comparative Analytical Perspective," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.14, 1981, pp.107-34.

11 David A Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear the Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict," *International Security*, Vol.21, No.2, Fall 1996 pp.41-75.

authority of the state-centre, the ensuing conflict can lead to regional and interstate conflict in three non-mutually exclusive instances:

i. by triggering an internal challenge that leads to external involvement;
ii. by inviting external involvement on the basis of transnational ethnic affinities (including threats of involvement) of one or more states supporting the secessionist group; and
iii. by inviting external involvement of one or more states on the basis of ethnic affinities supporting the state-centre.

Research on the causes of ethnic conflict and secession in South Asia highlights the importance of understanding both proximate and underlying causes. In advancing this argument, Brown and Ganguly suggest that because 'Ethnic conflicts have important regional and international effects, it is equally worthwhile to understand the dynamics of ethnic relations, the causes of ethnic conflicts, the processes by which ethnic conflicts become violent and what well-meaning leaders and government can do about these problems.'[12]

Then the dominant explanation for ethnic conflict is 'primordialism'. Primordialists argue that peoples' ethnic and religious identities have deep social, historical, and genetic foundations, and that the motivation for ethnic and kinship affiliation comes from these subjective, psychological forces internal to the individual and related to basic human needs of security and survival.[13] Individuals are bound to an ethnic group by virtue of some 'absolute import attributed to the very tie itself'. Primordialists argue that ethnic conflict and the desire for independence arise out of the systematic denial of minority aspirations, goals, values and needs by the modern state. Similarly, Azar and Burton argue that the 'Move to violence begins with the

12 Michael B. Brown and Sumit Ganguly (eds.), l997, *op.cit.*, p.7.

13 Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press 1981), p.25.

denial of separate identities, the absence of security for minorities and clear absence of effective participation for these minorities.'[14]

Some experts further contend that the spread of ethnic violence occurs when a state's treatment of its minorities fosters non-compliance with the prevailing norms of international relations. Minority groups recognize that internationalization of their demands can both simultaneously encourage internal mobilization and weaken the saliency and effectiveness of the state by creating international forums for sub-state grievances. A general lack of trust in others' intentions impels minority groups to pursue conflict through gradual escalation. The consequent behaviour between state-centre and minority inhibits both of them from making concessions, since each suspects that the other would exploit any conciliatory gesture. For instance, Lake and Rothchild argue that 'A less powerful group must be assured of institutional safeguards so that the more powerful group cannot exploit them.'

Unfortunately, weak, ethnically plural states have divided political loyalties and are less likely to develop civic cultures conducive to the pursuit of peaceful policies for the reduction and management of ethnic conflict.

Instrumentalist perspectives, therefore, lead us to assume that ethnic identification is created or maintained as a basis for collective action. Their stress is more on the advantages attached to ethnic (as opposed to class, occupation or some other) identity. In general, those who subscribe to this explanation emphasize the political dimensions of ethnic group behaviour, including protest, rebellion and non-violent action either as a way of protesting entitlements previously enjoyed or as a way of gaining access to new entitlements.

The term ethno-political is used to describe this group behaviour. The term is premised on the observation that group demands have shifted away from cultural, linguistic or religious interests, to political, material and territorial appeals for self determination. If the state-centre loses its autonomy by favouring

14 Edward B. Azar and John Burton, (eds.), "International Conflict Resolution" (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1986), in Rajat Ganguly, *Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism in South and Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003) p.30.

one group over another, the disadvantaged minority group is likely to believe that whatever social contract there was, its ties were broken and could not be fixed without some sort of intervention by a third party to provide minimal security guarantees. The mistrust that develops increases the desirability for the disadvantaged groups to pursue a proactive stance and to mobilize against the state in search of independence.[15]

The research that combines insights from primordial, political economy and instrumental perspective generally focuses on economic and political disparities between the state-centre and minority. For example, Gurr concludes that 'four factors determine whether or not a minority will mobilize against state dominance.'

The first is the degree of economic, social and political disparities between groups. In general, severely deprived groups have a greater chance of becoming politically active. By itself, though, deprivation is not a sufficient condition for ethnic conflict to ensue. A group must also possess a common purpose, strong leadership and organizational capacity.

The second factor is the salience of group identity. Crosscutting identity or low cohesion among ethnic groups is thought to reduce the probability that an ethnic group will be able to act in concert. Changes experienced at one level, such as dehumanization (a psychological factor), stimulate cohesiveness within a group and eventually increase polarization between groups. Symbols are important group markers in this process of mobilization.

Third, leadership is crucial to the rise and growth of ethnic movements. Increased scales of ethnic organization encourage ethnic mobilization to the extent that small-scale bases of ethnic organizations are weakened in favour of large-scale ethnic affiliations that provide the organizational framework and constituency for ethnic collective action.

Finally, ethnic mobilization must elicit a response from the dominant group, or the state against which it is reacting. Reciprocity and interactions also are important factors that have to

15 Ressel Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflicts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.143.

be considered. A competitive arena is created for state controlled resources, and the recognition of ethnicity as a basis for resource competitions and political access.

In consonance, the recent research on ethnic conflicts in South Asia finds support for all of these interpretations. For example, Tambiah links 'collective violence and riots to the rise of mass-based ethnic movements in Asia. Outlining a variety of examples from Asian cases, including the Ayodhya campaign and the resultant destruction of the Babri Mosque in India, the political mobilization of the Majahirs in Pakistan and the Tamils in Sri Lanka,' Tambiah argues that organized political violence is an expression of the needs and values of ethnic movements.[16]

Using insights based on analysis of elite and mass generated conflicts, Brown contends that in most cases, "ethnic conflicts in Asia are triggered by 'bad leaders' or 'bad neighbours' (bad leaders of neighbouring states). Armed conflicts are elite-triggered, in which the 'bad leaders' are the catalyst for changing potentially volatile situations into open warfare."[17]

In a slightly different vein, Sumit Ganguly has suggested that the 'underlying causes of conflicts in South Asia (including those in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) emanate from four sources: colonial — historical legacies, changes in existing norms due to modernization, contending claims on resource, and legacies left by external invasions.'[18]

Brass argues that 'state's legitimacy is closely tied to the kinds of ethnic policies it pursues (whether foreign or domestic).'

Narrow policies favouring one group are less sound than broad distributive ones. In the absence of strong, secular and organized parties, and strong institutional structure, ideology and culture become the focus for understanding South Asian politics. He

16 Stanley J. Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds: Ethnocationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p.200.

17 Michael E. Brown (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p.571.

18 Sumit Ganguly, "Ethno-religious Conflict in South Asia," *Survival*, Vol.35, No.2, Summer 1993, pp.88-109.

further argues that 'it is the state's actions that are directly responsible for these dilemmas in the first place.'[19]

The state does not only respond to crises, but is itself the dominating force providing differential advantages to different regions and ethnic groups.

Unfortunately, in many South Asian states the demand for new institutions cannot keep pace with rapid changes in the socio-economic system. This disjuncture creates recurring problems of governing ability for those in power. The net result is a conflict between the ethnic groups dominating political institutions and the counterbalancing efforts by minority groups to wrest control from the centre. If those in power do not undertake concerted efforts to realign the political system away from 'ethnic politics', the end result can be catastrophic. For example, the post-colonial politics of Sri Lanka. In the past, Sri Lanka's political system belonged to a select few of either a plutocracy or an English-educated political elite. In the early years of mass politics, the mass welfare schemes and state patronage system of the Sri Lanka government did not translate into the kinds of participatory democracy that is commonly associated with welfare states. Decision-making remained highly centralized and controlled by an elite group of Colombo-based politicians. Sri Lanka case clearly indicates why a centralized system based on identity politics is ill-prepared for the political mobilization of a minority group. Even if a state inherits a legal and constitutional system emphasizing individual rights and liberties, democracy can quickly become equated with quotas applied in the government, on campus, or in the workplace.

Pakistan offers a valuable contrast to India and Sri Lanka because democracy failed to establish a toehold there at the earliest stages of independence. The failure of civilian politics in Pakistan was due to the convergence of several factors, but weak institutions and economic decline are the main culprits.[20] As a result, Pakistan has never been able to overcome the polarization between its urban population with modern institutions and the rural

19 Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.187.

20 Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.210.

population that has been disassociated from the political process. Hewitt feels that 'high levels of domestic instability limit a state's ability to act authoritatively within the international community, limit its ability to act on domestic society with any legitimacy, and to deliver socio-economic packages aimed at bringing about widespread industrialization.' And in his comparison of India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, he concludes that 'all these states are weak, dominated by serious domestic conflicts that waste resources and endanger bilateral relations.'[21]

In the post-Cold War era, even though there was a considerable shift from supporting proxy wars, a major source of conflict escalation in many cases was towards mutual reconciliation. Few international efforts were directed in this period towards specific problems especially in South and Southeast Asia. For example, Ganguly finds that 'of the major, influential members of the international community only the United States was involved in such regional conflicts.'

The US was especially interested in the nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan, and continued to encourage confidence building measures. But it was highly unlikely that the United States could contribute greater resources to the resolution of conflicts in South Asia. In a similar vein, de Jorge Oudraat uses a matrix based on the nature of the conflict, its significance, and the interests of the UN Security Council's Permanent Five members to assess the likelihood of UN action in Asia's internal conflicts.[22] Her list reveals virtually no 'major actions' save the employment of 'Good Offices' in Burma in 1994. Her conclusions are that Asia's conflicts were not salient to the interests of the Permanent Five.

Findings on the causes of secessionist-ethnic conflicts are extremely useful for understanding why, when and how some groups mobilize, while others do not. But understanding causes does not necessarily help explain or predict when or how violent interactions will occur. Nor can it account for variations in the

21 Vernon Hewitt, *The New Politics of South Asia* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.198.

22 de Jorge Oudraat, "The United Nation and Internal Conflict," in Brown (ed)., 1996, *op.cit*., p.571.

scope, severity and timing of secessionist ethnic violence. Individuals and groups may be persuaded by ethnic elites to hate and fear members of 'other' groups, but the probability of war, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide depends on the opportunities and constraints that present themselves to the warring factions and their leaders at any given point in time.

More generally, ethnic conflict is a dynamic process in which at least five stages of escalation can be clearly identified. These include a latent stage in which differences between ethnic groups are made salient but there is not overt conflict; an onset phase whereby proximate causes act in tandem with the underlying causes to create the conditions for violence; a peak point initiated by a triggering event leading to large scale confrontation between groups; a de-escalation phase, including, perhaps, some form of third party involvement, and finally a termination phase, resulting in the resolution or transformation of the conflict. Ethnic conflicts can last months, years, or decades. The most salient ones are the protracted conflicts, fluctuating in intensity over the course of several decades, and involving state and society.

However, the successful use of coercion by a state in order to suppress local, ethnically-based challenges will encourage more of the same. Hence, coercion against minority ethnic groups is a normative factor if elite becomes habituated to the use of violence. Violence becomes part of the elite political culture and that is assimilated into the national identity. Horowitz long ago showed that the 'colonial recruitment of martial groups to counterbalance dominant ethnic groups is important because some ethnic groups become overepresented within the military as the Arakanese, Shan and Karens in Burma and the Sikhs and Gurkhas in India.'[23]

Leaders of military coups emerge from one ethnic group and come to rely on the support of these groups within the military and begin to act in a narrow range of interests defined in part by the support garnered from their ethnic group. Baxter and Rabman's study of Pakistani coups supports the 'corporate interest theory stressing that the most important factors accounting for Pakistani instability are limitations on military resources, incompetence of

23 Horowitz "Ethnic Groups in Conflict," in Rajat Ganguly, 2003, *op.cit*., p.38.

the bureaucracy, ethnic cleavages, and competition from the paramilitary.'

Moreover, it is often stated that, it is in states with little or no experience in managing ethnic tensions and weak institutional constraints that hegemonial exchange usually emerges. In it elite bargain for the distribution of resources and control the population through patron-client relations. Research on the international dimensions of secessionist ethnic conflicts clearly shows that a state's interaction with a third-party state with partisan ties to a conflict is a key factor determining whether a conflict will become protracted and violent. Groups that believe they are threatened will seek out support from their ethnic brethren. Two types of linkages are notable. The first is the particularist identities between groups that straddle borders. The second is the impact a global diaspora has on the development of ethnic leadership pools in non-neighbouring states.

- The displacement and movements of peoples from one region to another.
- An increase in demonstration effects by which the success of a secessionist movement emboldens other politically nascent groups to make similar claims.
- The diffusion or transmission of the conflict through information flows, diasporas, and transnational media networks that condition the behaviour of and embolden like-minded movements within the region.

For example, Gunarata argues that the Tamil Tigers have a well-developed international network which acts as an influential force in supporting political assassinations in foreign cities. In addition, such networks mean increased ties amongst diverse insurgent groups, which could lead to increased regional insecurity due to increased availability and sharing of weapons caches, sellers and technological advances.'[24]

Policy options on managing secessionist ethnic conflict depend on the explanations we accept for the causes of conflict. If one emphasizes the root causes (for example, mass mobilization,

24 Rohan Gunaratna, "Internationalisation of the Tamil Conflict (and its Implications)," *South Asia*, Vol.30 (Special Issue), p.119.

intra-elite competition, primordialism, or relative deprivation), the list of solutions would include partition, power sharing, democratization, constitutional entrenchment of ethnic or minority rights, proportional division of key offices, mutual vetoes, and so on. On the other hand, if one emphasizes dynamic interactions within a given conflict, then for finding solutions focus would have to be on first evaluating these processes (primarily the constraints and opportunities available to leaders in using force against minorities) and then taking early and preventive action.

Only after these characteristics have been carefully assessed and balanced can a viable solution be determined for any one state. Institutionalized forms of negotiation between states and minorities, for example, limit the available future options of decision makers because of two reasons: First, they influence the distribution of the capabilities of leaders (and the power between groups); second, they influence the preferences of elite decision-making.

Brown and Ganguly believe that the examination and assessment of government policies over time should depict various approaches that affect ethnic relations. Governments, they conclude, have four broad policy options: forced assimilation; induced assimilation; benign accommodation and toleration with an attitude. Forced assimilation is the most likely to lead to violence, and is probably the least effective option.[25]

Kaufmann, contrary to popular option, argues that 'partition is the only solution where there are cases of massive and ongoing ethnic tension. He argues, in the case of India, it was the failure to partition completely that led to new and protracted conflicts there.'[26]

Partitioning must be complete and it must unmix the populations, or it will lead to hostilities. Building on his analysis of mass-and-elite-based interaction in Asia, Brown argues that the international community should make conflict prevention its top priority. Preventive action requires a two track strategy to deal with mass level factor (or the 'permissive environment') as well as

25 Brown and Ganguly (eds.), 1970, *op.cit*., p.513.

26 Kaufmann in Rajat Ganguly, 2003, *op.cit.*, p.43.

the proximate (elite triggered) causes. The international community should help those who help themselves thus following the idea of 'ripe-timing' (e.g. when parties to the conflict are war weary). Brown suggests that 'policy makers, should not quickly bring to a conclusion those wars where such an imposed solution might not be compatible with social justice.'[27] Rather, international policy makers should place more emphasis on sustained, long-term efforts to prevent conflicts and concentrate on broadening civil society.

Although the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has made significant strides in developing a response to ethnic minorities issues for countries under its purview the South Asian regional organizations clearly lag behind. For example, ethnic minority issues do not fall under the purview of the SAARC and are treated primarily as bilateral issues between the countries affected. This is because, the South Asian states are lacking in common security perceptions, and India has found itself much embarrassed at SAARC meetings, thus, even though it does provide a place for Pakistan and India to meet, it is unlikely to become an effective security organization.

In their assessment of recent third-party efforts to bring peace to war-torn Sri Lanka, Weisberg and Hicks have come to the conclusion that three obstacles stand in the way of achieving a long lasting settlement. They are the lack of intra-party consensus on the government side; the lack of attention to the underlying needs and fears of the Tamils; and psychological barriers that inhibit trust and mutual confidence in the negotiation process. The authors suggest that a third party can contribute by bringing representatives of key stakeholders, the government and the LTTE, together in Track Two efforts.[28]

Two images are now familiar from most contemporary conceptual and empirical work in international conflicts. One is the image of, for the most part, internal conflicts, either in the context of failed states or in contexts of perceived zero-sum competition

27 Brown (ed.), 1996, *op.cit*., pp.624-25.

28 William Weisberg ad Donna Hicks, "Overcoming Obstacles to Peace: An Examination of Third-Party Processes," in Rajat Ganguly, 2003, *op.cit*., p.46.

for scarce resources, the management of which reflects highly partisan power and politics. The other is of the hierarchy of actors and agencies increasingly engaged in some aspect of the management of that conflict or the reconstruction of society after the cessation of conflict.[29] On this basis, the key imperatives — in addition to managing the immediate threat of violence — are those of seeking to bring the parties to the point of negotiations and, second, seeking to co-ordinate the activities of various agencies and actors involved in peace work and reconstruction. For the first, the task is that of seeking the opportunity to create movement in the parties' perceptions, in structural conditions, and in the relations between the groups in conflict.[30] For the second, the task is that of maximizing the opportunities provided by the diverse contributions, and minimizing the risk that these external agencies will themselves fall into conflict and competition in the process of seeking to assist.

If the roots of ethnic conflict lie in the antagonists' fear for their futures, as Lake and Rothchild suggest[31] the responses to ethnic or identity-based conflicts now acknowledge the central tasks of ensuring both structures for and confidence in secure futures. Intra-state ethnic conflict also requires theoretical reconsideration not only of the nature and causes of conflict but also of the role of the international community, the cultural assumptions that may shape interventions, and of the legitimacy of interventions.

a. Conflict management design — It is imperative to seek constructive responses to conflict that reflect the conditions of conflict and which both maximize participation in conflict management and create the conditions for dialogue; it is part of this theme also to take a 'contingent' approach, to recognize that responses to conflict are

29 at: http:// www.jha.ac/articles/a053.htm

30 William Zartman, "Conflict Reduction: Prevention, Management, and Resolution" in F.M. Deng and I. William Zartman (eds.) *Conflict Resolution in Africa* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1991), p.307.

31 D.A. Lake and D. Rothchild (eds.) *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion and Escalation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

dependent upon the circumstances and conditions of conflict.

b. Integration — Given the range of agencies and responses, it has become a key imperative of peacekeeping and peace building operations to co-operate in diverse activities which will both maximize the efficiency of such operations and reduce the wastage of duplication and competition.

In both domestic and international contexts, the increasing attention given to the nature and sources of conflict and the development of dispute management resources have led to a corresponding need to match the response to the conflict. The foundations of conflict management design in the domestic context are; lowering the cost (fiscal and interpersonal) of conflict; creating institutional alternatives; enhancing disputants' knowledge and competence in dispute management; maximizing the degree of participation in the design of processes and their implementation; the pursuit of constructive solutions to what may appear as intractable conflicts or entrenched practices; and, through these interventions, the transformation of participants' perception of each other, of the conflict, and of the means of resolving conflicts.[32] Responses to conflict require deliberate choices — choices particularly relating to timing, process, agencies, and intensity of intervention.

In both the domestic and international contexts, the response ranges from the structural to the interpersonal. At the 'macro' level the options include

- Exit — A severing of relations between ethnic group and government; by migration; or, though less likely, by territorial concession;
- Increased autonomy — Enhancing political, cultural, economic right of ethnic group; for example, language, religion, separate education. Difficulties arise if the ethnic

32 W.L. Ury, J.M. Brett, and S.B. Goldberg, *Getting Disputes Resolved: Designing Systems to Cut the Costs of Conflict* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988); L. Susskind, S. Mckearnan, J. Thomas-Larmer, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999).

group is dispersed, and not wholly or principally associated with a region, but compensations are still possible;

- Increased inclusion in national decision making — Though this can also raise the risk of the exercise being perceived as an insidious process of assimilation;
- Power sharing — for example joint exercise of governmental matters (on common interest issues); autonomy of minority on matters concerning them; proportionality in representation; and right to a minority veto.

At a 'micro' level, the tools and interventions are those which are increasingly oriented towards capacity building, confidence building, enhancing local participation, community reconstruction, and those responses which seek to address and, ideally, transform disputants' perceptions of each other. 'The macro options are primarily structural; the micro options are primarily relational and confidence-building strategies.'

The emphasis on designed and deliberate interventions reflects recognition of a range of possible options facing the states and the international community. In any response which is dependent upon the stage and escalation of conflict, intervention is necessarily 'phase based'. As Ronald Fisher and other suggest 'Interventions and realistic outcomes are 'contingent' upon the attributes of the conflict.'[33]

As far as a shift from the traditions of conflict management to the more diverse and dispersed resources of conflict transformation, is concerned, the former was dependent upon the principles and practices of state-centred Realpolitik, with an emphasis on diplomatic negotiations and, if necessary, external and coercive intervention, the latter places more emphasis on sub-state actors, the pursuit of inclusive negotiations (or less threatening pre-negotiations), the development of local resources in conflict resolution and in the now familiar expression 'the building of civic society.' Vayrynen says:

> The most direct way of dealing with ethnic conflicts is to initiate bilateral negotiations between the state and ethnic minority. The intractability and complexity of the conflict issues mean, however, that such negotiations are

33 R.J Fisher, *Interactive Conflict Resolution* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), p.125.

> often non-starters or, if initiated, they become easily stalemated. Thus, progress in the mitigation of ethnic conflicts calls for the transformation of both the actors and the rules of their mutual relations. This transformation usually requires the involvement of third parties and thus the restructuring of negotiations from bilateral to tri or multilateral.[34]

The problem of ethnicity in this region is not just a societal concern and an impediment to nation-building but also has interstate manifestations. The insecurity generated by ethnic conflicts in South Asia has both societal and state level repercussions, thereby, rendering their resolution more complicated.

The ethnic polarization and antagonism of the South Asian states have weakened the capacity of collective action, provoked inter-group antagonism and undermined the capacity of the state to manage conflicts of interest. All of this contributes towards instability and heightened insecurity at the societal level. The insecurity emanating from this is both economic and political in nature.

The detailed probing and investigation of most ethnic conflicts of South Asia highlights a myriad of issues and problems which may or may not be related to ethnicity. The key to understanding is that ethnicity is not causative of conflict but its politicization and deployment in situations of conflict, leads to turmoil in South Asia, both at intra and interstate level, and also in divided societies like Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka, it is possible to mange or reduce ethnic tensions but it is not possible to obliterate them.

To summarize, we should see that there is a need for international actors to focus on medium and long term planning as well as on preventing humanitarian crises and complex emergencies. In both instances, prevention will consists of governmental or non-governmental actions that are taken deliberately to keep particular states (or organized groups within them) from threatening or using organized violence, armed force, or related forms of coercion (such as repression) as the means to settle interstate or national political disputes. Finally, an assessment of early warning, risk assessment and prevention methods is required. Such evaluation would include the organized corroboration of conflict management interventions and assessments of conflicts; improved information exchange among conflict management practitioners; the assessment and evaluation of interventions and improved co-ordination of conflict prevention activities.

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34 Vayrynen, "Towards a Theory of Ethnic Conflicts and their Resolution," p.21, in Rajat Ganguly, 2003, *op.cit.*, p.274.