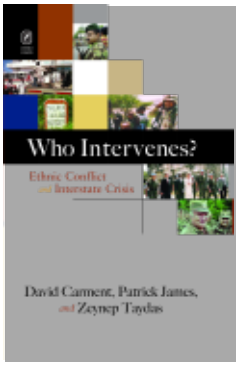
# 8. Conclusions: Taming the Untamable



CHAPTER EIGHT

# Conclusions:
## Taming the Untamable?

> If we consider international relations as a whole—as a body of thought over the centuries, as a collection of research findings, as a conventional wisdom, as a set of disciplined propositions about the world and the way it works—then we find that a message is waiting for us. It is a distinctive message about behavior in the world and ipso facto, about how to approach and analyze conflict. (Banks 1986)

### 1. Introduction: Taming the Untamable

Interstate ethnic conflicts comprise a significant but not well understood part of world politics. This inquiry contributed to an understanding of these conflicts through case studies of intervention. The cases span five regions—South Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe and the intersection of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East—and include states ranging from homogenous to diverse in ethnic composition, along with secessionist- and irredentist-based conflicts that extend from minor violence to full-scale war. Interstate conflicts encompassed by the case studies focus on major religious communities, such as Buddhist (Sri Lanka, Thailand), Christian Orthodox (Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Ethiopia, Greece), Hindu (India, Sri Lanka), and Muslim (Malaysia, Somalia, Bosnia, Turkey) and include states that range from highly institutionalized democracies to the extremes of unconstrained autocracy, with India and Somalia (after 1969) as polar instances. Given the range of actors and situations included, the present study seems in line with the epigraph to this chapter, which calls for a comprehensive approach to international relations. This study derives an overall message about ethnic conflict, interstate crisis, and intervention by considering all matters ranging from classic ideas to research findings. The message, in the end, is that ethnic intervention as associated with interstate crisis reflects demographics, institutional makeup, and more nuanced factors such as affinity and cleavage that impact upon the potential for conflict escalation.

This chapter unfolds in four additional sections, the first three of which correspond to the major goals of the study as set forth in chapter 1. The second section will review evidence about the framework and suggest priorities for its elaboration and improvement. Section 3 covers the propositions and results from testing, while section 4 derives implications for policy regarding ethnic conflict management and reduction. Section 5 provides a few final thoughts.

## 2. A Framework for Analysis of Intervention

The framework, which consists of three stages of interaction, appears consistent with the five case histories of ethnic intervention included in this book. Since these cases cover five world regions and a wide range of cultures and background conditions, confidence increases in the framework's general relevance. A few illustrations, corresponding to how respective stages of the framework have worked out in the case studies, will follow.

Stage 1's four ideal types of state, each with different preferences for involvement in ethnic strife, result from the interaction effects for ethnic composition and institutional constraints. On the one hand, chapter 3's analysis of India, a Type $II_b$ state, reveals a slow and halting path ultimately leading to a relatively limited intervention in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, chapter 6 conveys a story in which Serbia, a Type $I_a$ state, is well disposed from the outset toward violent intervention, most notably in Croatia and Bosnia, where only very heavy casualties and exceedingly poor prospects for victory eventually managed to bring highly destructive conflict to at least a temporary halt.

Stage 2, which assesses whether foreign policy will lead to interstate conflict and crisis through intervention, sees two additional variables, affinity and cleavage, come to the fore. Affinity and cleavage can combine to create a security dilemma for states, because the Chief of Government must decide on how to address them in the context of internal politics and even pressure from extremists. For states facing high domestic costs because of institutional constraints and ethnic diversity, the use of force is the least attractive option due to likely domestic repercussions and aggravation of the security dilemma. When cleavages and affinities are high, crisis escalation becomes more likely because elites of both states are disposed to initiate a conflict in an attempt to address perceived security weaknesses. Consider two examples: Somalia and Greece. Somalia's high affinity with Ogadeni and Darod clan members in the Ogaden, as compared to ethnic Somalis in other clans in

Kenya and Djibouti, explains crisis escalation between Somalia and Ethiopia. Described in chapter 7, the 1974 coup in Cyprus, backed by Greece, can be traced directly to very high ethnic cleavage on the troubled island, along with salient affinities between Greek Cypriots and their compatriots in Greece. Thus affinity and cleavage can create, in such cases, a second stage of effects beyond the mere disposition to act as derived from the first stage.

During stage 3, which corresponds to intervention itself, low-constraint, ethnically dominant states (Type $I_a$) should have a higher preference for the use of force than do high-constraint ethnically diverse states (Type $II_b$) because of low domestic costs. Types $II_a$ and $I_b$ fit between these two extremes. A state primarily interested in defending its security (i.e., Type $II_b$) is not necessarily an aggressor. This idea may be controversial because, as the Indo-Sri Lankan case shows in chapter 3, it often is difficult to identify the aggressor state in an interstate ethnic conflict. In this instance, neither state would be labeled as aggressive because each primarily defended its security. By contrast, as the Ethiopia-Somalia case shows in chapter 4, the aggressor sometimes is more clearly identified. In still other cases, such as Yugoslavia in chapter 6, culpability is diffuse because most participants, notably Serbia and Croatia, took aggressive actions to defend and reclaim territory and ethnic brethren.

Three areas stand out as priorities for further work on an elaborated and improved framework. Each will be addressed briefly in turn.

First, the relationship of an elite to its political constituency in shaping preferences for intervention is extremely important. Elites sometimes represent a dominant ethnic group, but that entity is highly divided between two or more constituencies. In turn, this relationship will affect the way the political process is played out, especially if institutional constraints are high and ethnicity is the basis for political mobilization. In some societies, crosscutting cleavages are an important way of counteracting the effects of internal divisions; ethnicity then may be less of a basis for political mobilization and an ethnically based foreign policy becomes less likely. It might be possible to evaluate, through surveys, for example, differences between elite and mass preferences to find out if these converge on certain foreign policy issues.

Second, affinity and cleavage appear to have important explanatory power in their own right. Further analysis could focus on, for example, the impact that diasporas have on the propensity for violent interstate ethnic conflict. These factors should be treated as structural preconditions that influence the magnitude and salience of a state's security dilemma.

Third, and finally, the framework should make explicit the role of extraregional actors in escalating, managing, and resolving conflict. This study has

focused primarily on why the main antagonists become involved, but not the levels of support expected from extraregional actors. Two reasons make the latter subject a priority. First, many cases simultaneously involve multiple actors, most notably major powers, the United Nations, and regional organizations. Actions taken by extraregional entities like great powers or international organizations (whether governmental or otherwise) can be important elements in the promulgation and resolution of ethnic conflict. Second, it also would be useful to know more about how and why geographically distant but ethnically linked states provide support for an ethnic conflict.

## 3. Propositions and Testing

Proposition 1, which asserts that constrained states will pursue multiple strategies when intervening in ethnic conflict, finds support. In particular, ethnically diverse, constrained states must shape their strategies in response to those of other states. When faced with the decision to use force against a state with fewer visible political costs (e.g., an ethnically dominant and low-constraint state), that decision to escalate will depend primarily on the strategy of the latter state, which possesses substantially more leeway in deciding what to do.

For three reasons, elites in unconstrained situations are in a better bargaining position when faced with those who have dispersed power. First, they are less prone to involuntary defection because their low-constraint, ethnic homogeneity allows them to control more effectively domestic political outcomes. Second, a belligerent ethnic foreign policy can be expected to create fewer domestic ramifications. Among other things, the leaders of these states do not have to worry about reelection. Third, if cooperation tentatively does emerge, low-constraint ethnically dominant states might be more tempted to defect voluntarily because of low political costs associated with doing so. In brief, the decision to use force is contingent primarily on the degree of cooperation from the state with fewer anticipated costs.

Consider the multiple strategies pursued by the two most highly constrained states assessed in this book: India and Malaysia as described in chapters 3 and 5, respectively. Indian leaders over the years tried limited backing for the Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka, mediation of ethnic strife on that island, military intervention, and combinations of strategies as well. Malaysian strategy converged over time toward a limited degree of support for the Thai Malay, with leaders of the Kelantan province sometimes pressing the issue harder than the central government. Furthermore, more favorable policies on

the part of the Thai government toward the Thai Malay attenuated support for either union with Malaysia or a separate state. The diverse strategies of these states contrast, for example, with the relentless irredentism of Type $I_a$ Somalia or undemocratic Greece.

Proposition 2, which asserts that ethnically diverse states are less likely to initiate crises with violence, is supported. India, Malaysia, and Yugoslavia (before 1990) provide direct evidence about diverse states in chapters 3, 5, and 6, respectively. India, an ethnically diverse and institutionally constrained state, did not initiate force directly against the Sri Lankan regime. India did, however, use force at a later point against the Tamil rebels. Evidence suggests that India was constrained in using force against Sri Lanka, but did everything short of that in trying to achieve its domestic and international objectives, which included imposing a solution of regional autonomy on the Sri Lankan government. India's elites could not allow Sri Lankan aggression against Tamil civilians in the north to go unchecked because of the impact on politics in South India. The solution of sending "peacekeeping" troops to Sri Lanka represented a compromise that would appease both the Sri Lankan government and South Indian Tamils.

Similarly, Malaysia's leaders remained averse to direct support and escalation of violence throughout the series of tense interactions with Thailand. Wariness about Islamic fundamentalism, along with the desire not to exacerbate internal divisions in a multiethnic society, inhibited the use of violent tactics. Furthermore, the right of hot pursuit granted by Thailand to Malaysia represented a major recognition of interest in the fate of the Patani province and also encouraged an evolutionary rather than revolutionary approach. Malaysia's restraint is echoed by that displayed by members of the Yugoslav federation prior to 1990. The components of that very diverse union knew that Belgrade would tolerate nothing beyond the occasional discussion of how the federation might evolve in its structures and processes.

Proposition 3, which asserts that crises are more likely to be severe when unconstrained, ethnically dominant states are involved, finds support. Somalia (after 1969), Serbia (after 1990), and Greece (ca. 1974), in chapters 4, 6, and 7, respectively, provide direct evidence.

When tracing interactions between Somalia and Ethiopia from Somali independence onward, changes in its decisions to use force can be linked to the latter's institutional developments. With Somalia's transition to autocracy in 1969, the Type $I_a$ state moved steadily toward war with its neighbor over the Ogaden. Somalia made repeated violent attempts at retrieval, which culminated in full-scale war by the end of the decade.

Serbia's elite benefited from forceful interventions in Slovenia, Croatia,

and Bosnia. Although elements in the military still loyal to the integrity of Yugoslavia objected, using force on behalf of ethnic brethren in these proto-states had wide and popular appeal. The JNA and well-armed coethnics in Croatia and Bosnia, in particular, increased the relative severity of crises that unfolded in the immediate aftermath of Yugoslavia's breakup.

Aided by Greek Cypriots, Greece initiated a coup in Cyprus. This dramatic action by the Type $I_a$ Greek state produced an intense crisis that ultimately elicited Turkish military intervention on the fervently disputed island. Although Turkey would be classified as a Type $II_a$ state at the time of its intervention, Ankara's use of force in 1974 fits the anticipated profile of sporadic interventionism. Turkey, which had not previously intervened directly in Cyprus, took limited military intervention to prevent *enosis*.

Proposition 4, which asserts that high cleavage and affinities increase the probability of intense interstate ethnic conflict, finds the strongest support. In general, ethnic cleavage and affinity influence foreign policy preferences significantly; they appear to be virtually necessary for interstate ethnic conflict and crisis. High levels for both increase fundamental and widespread insecurities, and elites will generally choose to act on them. Evidence suggests that when cleavages and affinity are high, there is a greater likelihood that the preferences of all states will shift toward policies that increase tension and sustain conflict.

For example, India's millions of Tamils had great affinity with ethnic brethren in Sri Lanka, and, as chapter 3 reveals, high cleavage on the island produced increasing levels of involvement in the conflict by the region's leading power. This process culminated in the Indian intervention of 1987, although countervailing factors, such as India's status as a Type $II_b$ state, undoubtedly helped it to avoid taking actions that would lead to interstate warfare. Affinity and cleavage, by contrast, prove to be near sufficient conditions for war in chapter 4's account of Somali invasion of the Ogaden. Somali leaders used the issue of the Ogaden effectively in creating a vision of a Greater Somalia that could be manipulated to great political advantage.

For Malaysia as described in chapter 5, rogue elements in Kelantan constituted the greatest policy concern vis-à-vis potential crisis with Thailand. In spite of affinity and some degree of cleavage, the relatively small size and limited resources of the Thai Malay minority ultimately reduced the chances of escalation to an interstate ethnic crisis. In particular, there is no evidence that cleavage ever rose to the level seen in the case of Cyprus or even Sri Lanka. This contrasts with the situation in Yugoslavia as described in chapter 6, where ethnic affinities and cleavages permeated the shattered federation. The collaboration of Serbia with minorities in other emerging states is merely the

most notorious part of the overall story of secessionism, irredentism, and ethnic cleansing. Perhaps the same could be said of chapter 7's account of Greek and Turkish efforts toward *enosis* and *taksim,* respectively—words steeped in the ideas of ethnic affinity and cleavage.

Proposition 5 asserts that ethnic intervention is most likely, in descending order, for Types $I_a$, $II_a$, $I_b$ and $II_b$. The case studies collectively reflect this ordering and also the more specific expectations regarding style of intervention as conveyed by figure 2.1. The Type $I_a$ states, Somalia (after 1969), Yugoslavia (after 1990), and Greece (1974), all intervened in ways that can be equated with belligerence. Perhaps the only remaining question here is, "Why did Greece wait until 1974?" although that is answered to some degree in chapter 7. Somewhat more restrained are the Type $II_a$ states, Somalia (before 1969) and Turkey (1974), which indeed show sporadic interventionism as a reflection of both circumstances and intermittent ethnic outbidding. Neither intervened in its respective target area with any degree of consistency, but each showed the potential for more intense involvement—realized in the case of Turkey when it intervened in Cyprus in response to the Greek-inspired military coup on that island. Next in line is Yugoslavia (before 1990), the Type $I_b$ state, where passive lobbying predominated within the federation. This activity picked up after the death of Tito, the founder of post–World War II Yugoslavia, but did not break out into civil war until after the transition of 1990, when an ethnically homogenous Serbian state took the lead in promoting irredentism and ultimately ethnic cleansing. Finally, the activities of the Type $II_b$ states, India and Malaysia, follow the anticipated path of realpolitik. While India did intervene in Sri Lanka in 1987, even then it did so as part of a plan to stabilize the island's embattled government rather than promote irredentism across the Palk Straits.

Taken together, the five propositions perform rather well across the five cases. Further case studies may alter the conclusions reached in this exposition, but that is a subject for another time. The generally positive performance of the framework and its attendant propositions lead naturally into a discussion of policy implications.

## 4. Conclusions and Implications about Interstate Ethnic Conflict Management and Prevention

Evidence from the five case studies in this book suggests that when combined, internal ethnic diversity and institutional constraints are associated with lower levels of interstate ethnic conflict. These conditions lead to mutual vul-

nerability among states that, in turn, reduces the potential for aggression and violence. The presence of these two conditions may make a head of government think twice about involvement in secessionist and irredentist strife, if there is any choice in the matter. Two problems, however, arise as a by-product of this conclusion.

First, ethnic diversity does not mean that domestic strife involving such states will be resolved more easily; rather, conflict management and reduction are more practical goals. The crucial task is to find an internal balance of power among ethnic groups, such as Yugoslavia before Tito's death. The implication is that societies that attempt to address their diversity through redistributive policies that favor one ethnic group, while perhaps politically astute for some elites at the domestic level, stand a greater chance of triggering interstate ethnic conflict if and when one group becomes preponderant. All of the states examined in the case studies within this book pursued some kind of redistributive policy that favored one ethnic group over another, but only two of the conflicts (Ethiopia-Somalia and Yugoslavia) resulted in direct interstate violence. These cases are distinguished, as established already, by the presence of Type $I_a$ states and high levels of ethnic affinity and cleavage.

The second problem is managing political transition. Evidence indicates that both new states and those undergoing political transition are most susceptible to involvement in interstate ethnic conflict. New states experience levels of domestic disorder that divide a state's elites, complicate decision making, prolong a crisis, or plunge a state into a protracted conflict with the consequence of inviting external intervention. This is true especially for newly democratized states, so it is essential to encourage alignments based on interests other than ethnicity and reduce disparities between groups so that dissatisfaction among minorities declines. For new states, their multiethnic character, compounded by internal cleavage and transnational affinities, may prove overwhelming for fragile institutions to manage. When political parties are aligned along ethnic interests, diverse and institutionally constrained developing states are prone to outbidding that can enhance the potential for interstate conflict.

Relevant in a practical way is the finding that external mechanisms, possibly formal regional alliances, may assist in reducing conflict among states. In this respect, it is important to distinguish security threats perceived by the regime and the general population from each other. The two do not always share the same security concerns; occasionally, the population itself constitutes the main internal threat to a regime and vice versa. The key point is to focus on issues of security that are shared by elites and masses within as well as between states. Shared security concerns may be the best way to prevent

interstate ethnic conflict. To date, few security issues engender this kind of sharing between masses and elites, although environmental problems and economic development often are cited as sources of interstate and intrastate cooperation. Working in tandem with this kind of cooperation is the important international monitoring of human rights abuses that may help push elites further in a more humane direction.

Another policy-related implication, brought out most directly in chapter 5's analysis of the Thai Malay strife, is that voluntary defection by one or both states in an ethnic conflict can be reduced when there is awareness of mutual vulnerability. Involuntary defection, a problem for constrained, diverse states, can be reduced if elites perceive it to be in their long-term interests to cooperate. For example, the Kelantan region represented Malaysia's potential for involuntary defection because of its support for the Thai Malay. This could have caused Malaysia to renege on its reciprocal agreements with Thailand. Pressure (and possibly incentives) applied on Kelantan leaders, however, eventually resulted in their tacit withdrawal from the issue. Furthermore, cooperation can be maintained even after the original threat dissipates, as in the Thai Malay case. Efforts to reduce defection among states seeking to support ethnic groups elsewhere can be successful. In this case, an alliance structure, based on a threat shared between Thailand and Malaysia, enhanced the relative attractiveness of military and political cooperation. Since ethnically diverse, constrained states already are oriented toward finding cooperative solutions, the key issue is finding ways in which to restrain less diverse or institutionally unconstrained states.

Another policy-related finding is that ethnically divided states attempting to make the simultaneous transition to more economically open and democratic systems will succumb to the politics of intransigence, confrontation, and conflict if the political system is arranged along ethnic lines and one ethnic group is allowed to become dominant. Leaders of ethnically based political parties will lack, over the short term, the capacity to widen the policy agenda to encompass nonethnic issues. When other bases of mobilization are weak, ethnic elites depend on direct support from their ethnic constituency, and in turn, elites seek to control and influence these groups. Thus the key problem raised by the conflict in Yugoslavia, for example, is finding ways to ensure conflict reduction within the state rather than having secessionist minorities leave. Given the right international and domestic conditions, which may include democratization, more liberal trade, and incentives for interethnic cooperation, secessionist minorities may reduce their demands for autonomy. Unfortunately, in the Yugoslav case, there were too few incentives for Slovenia and Croatia to stay and too many for them to defect.

## 5. Some Final Thoughts

The absence of a revised overarching framework of policies on ethnic conflict management and resolution is linked intimately to changes in thinking about the nature of state sovereignty, which includes the conduct of states external to a conflict, and internal changes, including democratization, that states are experiencing. While the passing of the Cold War removed impediments to an examination of the preceding factors, the collapse of communism ushered in a volatile period of political experimentation in which, over the short term at least, domestic ethnic conflicts continued on toward the end of the twentieth century and beyond. The sudden overthrow of authoritarian regimes in the early 1990s was accompanied by a rapid escalation of ethnic tensions on a global scale. Intense, violent full-scale wars emerged. This was as true in Africa as in Eastern and Central Europe. In some cases the potential for interstate ethnic conflict remains high; Azerbaijan, Georgia, Sudan, Angola, the Congo, and the Ukraine come to mind, while others have gradually dissipated with time. Only time will tell how many more Yugoslavias may be out there waiting to happen, but everything possible should be done to anticipate, prevent, or at least manage such crises. The framework developed and tested in this book is intended as a step in the direction of greater understanding, in order to establish the foundation for a more comprehensive analysis of ethnic conflict, interstate crises, and intervention.