The MIT Press

Containing Fear

The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict

David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild

$\mathbf{S}$ince the end of the Cold War, a wave of ethnic conflict has swept across parts of Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Africa. Localities, states, and sometimes whole regions have been engulfed in convulsive fits of ethnic insecurity, violence, and genocide. Early optimism that the end of the Cold War might usher in a new world order has been quickly shattered. Before the threat of nuclear armageddon could fully fade, new threats of state meltdown and ethnic cleansing have rippled across the international community.

The most widely discussed explanations of ethnic conflict are, at best, incomplete and, at worst, simply wrong. Ethnic conflict is not caused directly by inter-group differences, "ancient hatreds" and centuries-old feuds, or the stresses of modern life within a global economy. Nor were ethnic passions, long bottled up by repressive communist regimes, simply uncorked by the end of the Cold War.

We argue instead that intense ethnic conflict is most often caused by collective fears of the future. As groups begin to fear for their safety, dangerous and difficult-to-resolve strategic dilemmas arise that contain within them the potential for tremendous violence. As information failures, problems of credible commitment, and the security dilemma take hold, groups become apprehensive, the state weakens, and conflict becomes more likely. Ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs, operating within groups, build upon these fears of insecurity and polarize society. Political memories and emotions also magnify these anxieties, driving groups further apart. Together, these between-group

David A. Lake is Professor of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego, and Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation. Donald Rothchild is Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Davis.

and within-group strategic interactions produce a toxic brew of distrust and suspicion that can explode into murderous violence.

Managing ethnic conflicts, whether by local elites and governments or concerned members of the international community, is a continuing process with no end point or final resolution. It is also an imperfect process that, no matter how well-conducted, leaves some potential for violence in nearly all multi-ethnic polities. Ethnic conflict can be contained, but it cannot be entirely resolved. Effective management seeks to reassure minority groups of both their physical security and, because it is often a harbinger of future threats, their cultural security. Demonstrations of respect, power-sharing, elections engineered to produce the interdependence of groups, and the establishment of regional autonomy and federalism are important confidence-building measures that, by promoting the rights and positions of minority groups, mitigate the strategic dilemmas that produce violence.

International intervention may also be necessary and appropriate to protect minorities against their worst fears, but its effectiveness is limited. Noncoercive interventions can raise the costs of purely ethnic appeals and induce groups to abide by international norms. Coercive interventions can help bring warring parties to the bargaining table and enforce the resulting terms. Mediation can facilitate agreement and implementation. A key issue in all interventions, especially in instances of external coercion, is the credibility of the international commitment. External interventions that the warring parties fear will soon fade may be worse than no intervention at all. There is no practical alternative to active engagement by the international community over the long term.

This essay presents a framework for understanding the origins and management of ethnic conflict. Focusing on the central concept of ethnic fear, we attempt to provide a broad framework for comprehending, first, how the various causes of ethnic conflict fit together and potentially interact and, second, how policies can be crafted to address these causes. Moreover, while our approach is largely "rational choice" oriented, we also seek to examine how non-rational factors such as political myths and emotions interact with the strategic dilemmas we highlight. We recognize that many of the ideas presented here have already appeared in the burgeoning literature on ethnic conflict, and do not claim to be presenting an entirely novel approach, although we note some areas of disagreement with prevailing approaches.

Our analysis proceeds in two steps. The first section examines the intergroup and intra-group strategic dilemmas that produce ethnic violence. Building on this diagnosis, the second section discusses several ways of managing

ethnic conflicts both before and after they become violent. We consider, first, confidence-building measures that can be undertaken by local elites and governments—or promoted by members of the international community—to quell real or potential violence and, second, external interventions led by concerned states and organizations. The concluding section highlights several policy initiatives that follow from our analysis.

Strategic Interactions and the Causes of Ethnic Conflict

Most ethnic groups, most of the time, pursue their interests peacefully through established political channels. But when ethnicity is linked with acute social uncertainty, a history of conflict, and fear of what the future might bring, it emerges as one of the major fault lines along which societies fracture.[1] Vesna Pešić, a professor at the University of Belgrade and a peace activist in the former Yugoslavia, says it well: ethnic conflict is caused by the "fear of the future, lived through the past."[2]

Collective fears of the future arise when states lose their ability to arbitrate between groups or provide credible guarantees of protection for groups. Under this condition, which Barry Posen refers to as "emerging anarchy," physical security becomes of paramount concern.[3] When central authority declines, groups become fearful for their survival. They invest in and prepare for violence, and thereby make actual violence possible. State weakness, whether it arises incrementally out of competition between groups or from extremists actively seeking to destroy ethnic peace, is a necessary precondition for violent ethnic conflict to erupt. State weakness helps to explain the explosion of ethnic violence that has followed the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and it has also led to violence in Liberia, Somalia, and other African states.

State weakness may not be obvious to the ethnic groups themselves or external observers. States that use force to repress groups, for instance, may appear strong, but their reliance on manifest coercion rather than legitimate

---

1. Kathleen Newland. "Ethnic Conflict and Refugees," in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 161.
2. Vesna Pešić, Remarks to the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (IGCC) Working Group on the International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflict, October 1, 1994.
3. Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," in Brown, *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, pp. 103–124. See also Jack Snyder, "Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State," in ibid., pp. 79–101.

authority more accurately implies weakness. More important, groups look beyond the present political equipoise to alternative futures when calculating their political strategies. If plausible futures are sufficiently threatening, groups may begin acting today as if the state were in fact weak, setting off processes, discussed below, that bring about the disintegration of the state. Thus, even though the state may appear strong today, concerns that it may not remain so tomorrow may be sufficient to ignite fears of physical insecurity and a cycle of ethnic violence. The forward-looking nature of the strategic dilemmas emphasized here makes the task of forecasting or anticipating ethnic conflicts especially difficult, both for the participants themselves and external actors who would seek to manage them effectively through preventive diplomacy.

Situations of emerging anarchy and violence arise out of the strategic interactions between and within groups. Between groups, three different strategic dilemmas can cause violence to erupt: information failures, problems of credible commitment, and incentives to use force preemptively (also known as the security dilemma). These dilemmas are the fundamental causes of ethnic conflict. Within groups, ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs may make blatant communal appeals and outbid moderate politicians, thereby mobilizing members, polarizing society, and magnifying the inter-group dilemmas. "Non-rational" factors such as emotions, historical memories, and myths can exacerbate the violent implications of these intra-group interactions. Together, these inter-group and intra-group interactions combine, as we explain in this section, to create a vicious cycle that threatens to pull multi-ethnic societies into violence.[4]

STRATEGIC INTERACTIONS BETWEEN GROUPS

Competition for resources typically lies at the heart of ethnic conflict. Property rights, jobs, scholarships, educational admissions, language rights, government contracts, and development allocations all confer benefits on individuals and groups. All such resources are scarce and, thus, objects of competition and occasionally struggle between individuals and, when organized, groups. In

---

4. In this article, we are concerned mostly with internal ethnic conflict. For a discussion of transnational ethnic conflict, and especially its international diffusion and escalation, see David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement: The International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflict* (forthcoming).

societies where ethnicity is an important basis for identity, group competition often forms along ethnic lines.[5]

Politics matter because the state controls access to scarce resources. Individuals and groups that possess political power can often gain privileged access to these goods, and thus increase their welfare.[6] Because the state sets the terms of competition between groups, it becomes an object of group struggle. Accordingly, the pursuit of particularistic objectives often becomes embodied in competing visions of just, legitimate, and appropriate political orders.

In multi-ethnic societies, resource rivalries and the struggle to control state policy produce competing communal interests. In Nigeria, for example, each ethno-regional group looks to the state to favor it when distributing public resources, producing, as Claude Ake observes, an "overpoliticization" of social life which gravely weakens the state itself.[7] In Yugoslavia, Slovenians and Croatians resented the system of federal redistribution to the poorer regions of the country; their publics backed their leaders' expressions of indignation, ultimately fueling the demand for greater political autonomy.[8] When groups conclude that they can improve their welfare only at the expense of others, they become locked into competitions for scarce resources and state power.

Analytically, however, the existence of competing policy preferences is—by itself—not sufficient for violence to arise. Observers too often fail to recognize this important theoretical point and misattribute violence to competition over scarce resources. Violence, after all, is costly for all communal actors: people are killed; factories, farms, and whole cities are destroyed; resources that might have been invested in new economic growth are diverted instead to destructive ends. As violence, and preparing for violence, is always costly, there must exist in principle some potential bargain short of violence that leaves both sides in a dispute better off than settling their disagreements through the use of force; at the very least, the same *ex post* agreement could be reached without the use

---

5. This is, of course, not true as a universal rule. Although ethnic identities are often strong, groups can also form along class, religious, or other lines. The more politically salient ethnicity is, however, the more likely it is that groups will organize on this basis. This is an important way in which the between-group and within-group variables examined here interact.

6. Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 34–37; and Milton J. Esman, *Ethnic Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 216.

7. Claude Ake, "Why Is Africa Not Developing?" *West Africa*, No. 3538 (June 17, 1985), p. 1213.

8. Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1995), pp. 69–70.

of force, and the resources that would have been expended in violence divided somehow between the parties *ex ante*.[9] This holds irrespective of the breadth of the group demands or the extent of the antagonisms. The farther apart the policy preferences of the groups are, the greater the violence necessary for one group to assert its will over the other, and the greater the resources that can be saved by averting the resort to force.[10]

Despite appearances, then, competing policy preferences by themselves cannot explain the resort to violence. The divorce between the two halves of Czechoslovakia is a sterling example of two ethnic groups, in conflict over the distribution of resources within their federal state but anxious to avoid the costs of war, developing a mutually agreeable separation to avoid a potentially violent confrontation. For negotiations to fail to bridge the demands of opposing groups, at least one of three strategic dilemmas must exist. Each dilemma alone is sufficient to produce violent conflict. Nonetheless, they typically occur together as a dangerous syndrome of strategic problems.

INFORMATION FAILURES. Because violence is costly, groups can be expected to invest in acquiring knowledge about the preferences and capabilities of the opposing side and bargain hard, but eventually reach an agreement short of open conflict.[11] Groups might even be expected to reveal information about themselves to prevent violence from erupting. When individuals and groups possess private information and incentives to misrepresent that information, competing group interests can produce actual conflict. We refer to this as an information failure. When information failures occur, groups cannot acquire or share the information necessary to bridge the bargaining gap between themselves, making conflict possible despite its devastating effects.

Incentives to misrepresent private information exist in at least three common circumstances. In each, revealing true information undercuts the ability of the group to attain its interests. First, incentives to misrepresent occur when groups are bargaining over a set of issues and believe they can gain by bluffing. By

---

9. James Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem," unpublished manuscript, University of Chicago, 1993; and Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 379–414.
10. Moreover, a mutually preferred bargain must exist even if the resources available to groups are declining, because violence only further reduces the resource pool relative to possible agreements. For an empirical demonstration of this point, see Valerie Percival and Thomas Homer-Dixon, *Environmental Scarcity and Violent Conflict: The Case of Rwanda* (Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1995).
11. The following two sub-sections draw heavily upon Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem," and "Rationalist Explanations for War," two of the best theoretical works on conflict between organized groups.

exaggerating their strengths, minimizing their weaknesses, and mis-stating their preferences, groups seek to achieve more favorable divisions of resources. Through such bluffs, however, they increase the risk that negotiations will fail and conflicts arise.[12]

Second, groups may be truly aggressive but do not want to be branded as such. They may seek to minimize internal opposition, or to insulate themselves from repercussions in the broader international community. Although typically only minimal sanctions are imposed by other states, most groups seek to avoid the label of an aggressor or violator of international norms and the political isolation that such a classification can carry.

Finally, in conflicts where the groups are simultaneously negotiating and preparing for ethnic war, any attempt to facilitate compromise by having each side explain how it plans to win on the battlefield will seriously compromise the likelihood that it will win should war occur. Thus, groups cannot reveal their strategies or derive accurate predictions of their likely success. Paradoxically, each party is bound by its own self-interest to withhold the information crucial to bringing about an agreement. Concerned that private information they provide on how they intend to protect themselves or attack others will redound to their disadvantage, groups may refrain from revealing the information necessary to forge a mutually satisfactory compromise.[13]

Information failures are possible whenever two or more ethnic groups compete within the political arena. Groups always possess private information and, as these three circumstances suggest, often possess incentives to misrepresent that information. Information failures are thus ubiquitous in ethnic relations. In multi-ethnic societies, states can often communicate and arbitrate successfully between groups and thereby help preclude and resolve information failures. Indeed, communication and arbitration can be understood as two of the primary functions of the state. When effective, states create incentives and a sense of security that allow groups to express their desires and articulate their political aspirations and strategies. Not only do ethnic leaders respond to sidepayments offered by state elites, but—in seeking to curry favor—they are more prepared to provide private information to a "third party" than they are

---

12. In game-theoretic terms, actors will choose to bluff depending upon 1) the beliefs each actor holds about the other's "type" (i.e., the actor is more likely to bluff if it believes the other is "weak" and the second actor believes the first is "strong") and 2) the relative benefits (payoff) and costs (signal) of successful bluffing, unsuccessful bluffing, and not bluffing (i.e., the higher the payoff from success and the smaller the cost of the signal, the more likely the actor is to bluff).
13. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," p. 400.

to an adversary.[14] As the state weakens, however, information failures become more acute and violence more likely. If one group believes that the other is withholding information, it too may begin to hold back crucial data or antici-pate the failure of negotiations. Groups become suspicious of the intentions of others, and may begin to fear the worst. In this way, information failures and even the anticipation of such failures may drive groups to actions that under-mine the ability of the state to maintain social peace. When this occurs, even previously effective states will begin to unravel. State capabilities, then, are at least partly affected by the magnitude of the information failure and the beliefs and behaviors of the groups themselves.

Information failures cut two ways. On the one hand, all policy differences can be bridged—at least in theory—if the alternative is a costly conflict. Even cultural symbols and practices central to a people's conception of itself as a distinct ethnic group may be negotiable if the known alternative is the outright destruction of the group. On the other hand, strategic incentives to misrepre-sent private information are a primary impediment to peaceful compromise, and these incentives may be present in a wide range of circumstances. Thus, careful mediation by third parties who can probe the true preferences of groups and communicate them to relevant others is important for creating and main-taining cooperative ethnic relations. States able to arbitrate between groups are normally the preferred instrument to this end, but sometimes they too fall victim to the information failures they are designed, in part, to prevent. When this occurs, mediation by outside parties may be required.

PROBLEMS OF CREDIBLE COMMITMENT. Ethnic conflicts also arise because groups cannot credibly commit themselves to uphold mutually beneficial agreements they might reach.[15] In other words, at least one group cannot effectively reassure the other that it will not renege on an agreement and exploit it at some future date. As exploitation can be very costly—up to and including the organized killing of one group by another—groups may prefer to absorb even high costs of war today to avoid being exploited tomorrow.

---

14. We recognize, of course, that the state is not always a neutral third party in domestic disputes, but this simply indicates that the state has already forfeited at least in part the ability to perform this function.
15. Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem"; and Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; Hardin, *One for All*, p. 143; and Barry R. Weingast, "Constructing Trust: The Political and Economic Roots of Ethnic and Regional Conflict," unpublished manuscript, Stanford University, 1995.

Stable ethnic relations can be understood as based upon a "contract" between groups.[16] Such contracts specify, among other things, the rights and responsibilities, political privileges, and access to resources of each group. These contracts may be formal constitutional agreements or simply informal understandings between elites. Whatever their form, ethnic contracts channel politics in peaceful directions.

Most importantly, ethnic contracts contain "safeguards" designed to render the agreement self-enforcing. They contain provisions or mechanisms to ensure that each side lives up to its commitments and feels secure that the other will do so as well. Typical safeguards include, first, power-sharing arrangements, electoral rules, or group vetoes that prevent one ethnic group from setting government policy unilaterally;[17] second, minority control over critical economic assets, as with the whites in South Africa or Chinese in Malaysia;[18] and third, as was found in Croatia before the breakup of Yugoslavia, maintenance of ethnic balance within the military or police forces to guarantee that one group will not be able to use overwhelming organized violence against the other.[19] These political checks and balances serve to stabilize group relations and ensure that no group can be exploited by the other. In Barry R. Weingast's words, "reciprocal trust can be induced by institutions."[20]

---

16. The term "ethnic contract" was, we believe, coined by Leonard Binder at the first meeting of the IGCC Working Group on the International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflict, May 13–14, 1994. On relational contracting more generally, see Oliver Williamson, *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism: Firms, Markets, and Relational Contracting* (New York: Free Press, 1985); for an application to inter-state relations, see David A. Lake, "Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Winter 1996), pp. 1–33.

17. Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Timothy D. Sisk, *Democratization in South Africa: The Elusive Social Contract* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); and Weingast, "Constructing Trust."

18. Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, "South Africa: The Opening of the Apartheid Mind," in John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, eds., *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 226–250.

19. Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992); and Hardin, *One for All*, pp. 58 and 159.

20. Weingast, "Constructing Trust," p. 15. Aleksa Djilas, "Fear thy Neighbor: The Breakup of Yugoslavia," in Charles A. Kupchan, ed., *Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 99, argues that the communist party served as the primary safeguard in Yugoslavia, largely through coercion and repression, and that the defeat of the party in the 1990 elections left a political vacuum. He faults the party for not developing "stable institutions" that could have regulated relations among the republics. In "Constructing Trust," on the other hand, Weingast credits Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito for constructing a set of veto mechanisms institutionalizing trust among the groups.

The terms of the ethnic contract reflect the balance of political power between the groups and their beliefs about the intentions and likely behaviors of one another. Safeguards are crafted to respond to the specific circumstances of each set of groups. However, ethnic contracts can be undermined and problems of credible commitment created by changes in either the ethnic balance of power or the beliefs of groups about others. These changes and their implications are captured in two separate but related models, one by James Fearon that focuses on the balance of political power between groups and one by Weingast that emphasizes beliefs.[21]

The political power of groups is determined by demography, the resources available to each group, and their capacity to organize effectively.[22] More powerful groups have a larger say in setting the terms of the contract. However, for the less powerful group to agree voluntarily to enter and abide by the contract, its interests must also be addressed, including its concern that the more powerful group will try to exploit it and alter the terms of the contract at some future date. Indeed, it is the minority, fearful of future exploitation and violence, that ultimately determines the viability of any existing ethnic contract. When the balance of ethnic power remains stable—and is expected to remain stable—well-crafted contracts enable ethnic groups to avoid conflict despite their differing policy preferences.

However, the ethnic balance of power does evolve over time. As in Lebanon, disparities in population growth rates will eventually alter the balance between groups. Differing access to resources may increase prosperity for some groups and poverty for others, also shifting the ethnic balance. When multi-ethnic polities fragment, as in Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, the relevant political space alters rapidly and the various ethnic groups that once counted their numbers on a national scale must now calculate their kin in terms of the new, smaller territorial units, and may find themselves in a stronger or weaker position. It is apprehension over the consequences of any dissolution, for instance, that motivates Protestants in Northern Ireland to hold tenaciously onto union with the largely Protestant United Kingdom rather than merge with the predominantly Catholic state of Ireland. When such changes in the ethnic

---

21. Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem"; and Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; see also Fearon, "Commitment Problems and the Spread of Ethnic Conflict," in Lake and Rothchild, *Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement*. See Weingast, "Constructing Trust"; this model is also discussed in Robert H. Bates and Barry R. Weingast, "Rationality and Interpretation: The Politics of Transition," paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, August 31–September 3, 1995.
22. Hardin, *One for All*, p. 56.

balance of power have not been anticipated, or if the safeguards are overly rigid and cannot be renegotiated easily, the ethnic contract will be at risk of collapse.

Problems of credible commitment arise, as Fearon shows, whenever the balance of ethnic power shifts.[23] As the influence of one side declines, previously enforceable ethnic contracts become unenforceable. The checks and balances that safeguard the agreement today become insufficient tomorrow. Even if the group that is growing stronger promises not to exploit the weaker group in the future, there is nothing to prevent it from breaking its promise when it actually is stronger. Recognizing this, the declining side may choose to fight today rather than accede to an ethnic contract that will become increasingly unenforceable as time progresses.

Independent of changes in the ethnic balance of power, Weingast demonstrates that if information is incomplete and there are costs to becoming a victim in the future, changes in the beliefs of one group about the intentions of another can play a large role in setting the parties on the road to violence.[24] If a group believes that there is even a small chance that it may become a target of a genocidal attack, it may choose conflict over compromise and the risk of future destruction. To provoke conflict, one group need not believe that the other really is aggressive, only fear that it might be. With incomplete information, even small changes in beliefs about the intentions of the other group can generate massive violence.

Information is costly to acquire and, as a result, there is always some uncertainty about the intentions of other groups. Groups compensate for their informational limitations by acting on the basis of prior beliefs about the likely preferences of others (as well as the costs of resorting to violence and other variables). These beliefs are formed through historical experience—the "past," in Pešić's words—and represent each group's best guess about the other's intentions. Groups then update these beliefs as new information becomes available to them. Nonetheless, information is always incomplete and groups are forever uncertain about each other's purposes. Conflict, then, always remains possible in ethnic interactions.

Problems of credible commitment in ethnic relations are universal. Concerned that the balance of power may tip against them or that the other may

23. Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem."
24. Weingast, "Constructing Trust"; and Bates and Weingast, "Rationality and Interpretation." The term "beliefs" is used here in its game-theoretic sense to refer to the conditional probability of an actor holding one set of preferences (intentions, in the text; payoffs from a game, more formally) rather than another. Actors form beliefs subjectively, largely on the basis of past interactions.

have hostile intentions, groups worry that agreements made today will not be honored tomorrow. Effective states can help to mitigate these problems of credible commitment by enforcing existing ethnic contracts. When the future risk of exploitation is high, however, current relations and the state itself can quickly unravel. Fearful of the future, weaker groups may resort to preemptive violence today to secure their position in times to come. When this happens, outside peacekeepers or peace enforcers with sufficient military capabilities and political will may be the only way to ensure ethnic peace.

THE SECURITY DILEMMA. Posen has recently extended the concept of the security dilemma, first developed in international relations, to the study of ethnic conflict. In the broadest sense of the concept, the security dilemma is understood to follow axiomatically from anarchy. Under anarchy, states are dependent upon self-help for their security and must therefore maintain and perhaps expand their military capabilities. This can threaten others, who react by maintaining and expanding their capabilities, creating a spiral of arms-racing and hostility. The dilemma follows from the inability of the two sides to observe each other's intentions directly; if each party knew the other was arming strictly for defensive purposes, the potential spiral would be cut short. But because states cannot know the intentions of others with certainty, in Posen's words, "what one does to enhance one's own security causes reactions that, in the end, can make one less secure."[25]

Understood in this broad way, however, the security dilemma more accurately rests on the information failures and problems of credible commitment just discussed. It is the inability both to know with certainty the intentions and abilities of others and to commit credibly not to arm for offensive purposes that drives the spiral. The unique analytic core of the security dilemma lies in situations where one or more disputing parties have incentives to resort to preemptive uses of force. We use the term here to refer to these specific incentives.[26] As Robert Jervis observes, incentives to preempt arise when offensive military technologies and strategies dominate more defensive postures, and thus the side that attacks first reaps a military advantage.[27] The offense is likely to dominate when there are significant military benefits from surprise

25. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," p. 104.
26. We recognize that some readers may prefer the broader use of the term "security dilemma." We believe that the distinctions between information failures, problems of credible commitment, and incentives to use force preemptively are useful and important, and we see no reason to use a less precise catchall term when more precise and analytically refined definitions are available.
27. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167–213. See also George H. Quester, *Offense and Defense in the International System* (New York: John Wiley, 1977).

and mobility. Geography will also matter, because some kinds of terrain (such as mountainous areas) and settlement patterns (such as exclusive ethnic zones) are easier to defend than others.[28] When the offense dominates, even *status quo* groups (and states), it follows, may be tempted to launch preemptive strikes to avoid a possibly even worse fate.

When incentives to use force preemptively are strong, the security dilemma takes hold and works its pernicious effects. Fearful that the other might preempt, a group has an incentive to strike first and negotiate later. In ethnic relations, as in international relations, when there are significant advantages to preemption, a cycle of violence can seize previously peaceful groups even as they seek nothing more than their own safety. By the same logic, previously satisfied groups can be driven to become aggressors, destroying ethnic harmony in the search for group security.

STRATEGIC INTERACTIONS WITHIN GROUPS

As we have just shown, strategic interactions between groups create the unstable social foundations from which ethnic conflict arises. Information failures, problems of credible commitment, and the security dilemma demonstrate that even when groups mean well and calculate the costs and benefits of alternatives realistically, conflict can still erupt. Even in "the best of all possible worlds," these strategic dilemmas can produce violent conflict.

Under conditions of actual or potential state weakness, and as the strategic dilemmas described above begin to take hold, two catalysts—ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs—can produce rapid and profound polarization within a multi-ethnic society. Social polarization, in turn, magnifies the strategic dilemmas and potential for conflict described above. As we explain in this section, political memories, myths, and emotions also magnify the polarizing effects of activists and entrepreneurs, further accelerating the vicious cycle of ethnic fear and violence.

All individuals desire to belong to groups, but the strength of this desire differs.[29] In a model of "ethnic dissimilation," Timur Kuran demonstrates that ethnic activists—individuals with especially strong needs to identify with ethnic kin—can manipulate such desires to produce a process of social polarization that is rapid, apparently spontaneous, and essentially unpredictable.[30] By

---

28. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict."
29. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict.*
30. Timur Kuran, "Ethnic Dissimilation and its Global Transmission," in Lake and Rothchild, *Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement.*

persuading others to increase their public ethnic activity in order to maintain standing within the group, Kuran argues, ethnic activists can drive individuals to represent falsely their true preferences. While they might prefer, for instance, not to associate exclusively with members of their own group, individuals are pressed by activists and the social pressures they spawn to alter their behavior in a more "ethnic" direction. In this way, Kuran finds, ethnic activists can cause previously integrated communities to separate along ethnic lines.

Political entrepreneurs—individuals who may not share the beliefs of extremists but who seek political office and power—may reflect the polarization of societies and, through their actions, propel this process further. Ethnicity often provides a key marker for self-aggrandizing politicians seeking to build constituencies for attaining or maintaining political power.[31] Politicians in the middle of the political spectrum or those who court ethnically heterogeneous constituencies are vulnerable, in turn, to political extremists seeking to draw electoral support from only a more ethnically homogeneous and possibly more militant constituency. When faced with the threat of such challenges, even centrist politicians can be driven to embrace a more "ethnic" position and defend communal interests more vigorously, a phenomenon often referred to as ethnic outbidding.[32] Political entrepreneurs can also reinforce processes of social polarization. Like activists, they can highlight and legitimate ethnic associations and affinities and raise the political saliency of ethnicity. In framing issues for the public, moreover, political entrepreneurs can exaggerate the hostility of others and magnify the likelihood of conflict—thereby distorting public debate and images of other groups and driving co-ethnics toward them for power and support. President Slobodan Milošević's control over the media in Serbia, for instance, allowed him to present a one-sided view of Croat violence toward Croatian Serbs.[33] In short, political entrepreneurs both reflect and stimulate ethnic fears for their own aggrandizement.

Many analysts mistakenly focus on social polarization and the role of ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs in fomenting violence as the primary if not sole cause of ethnic conflict. Empirically, it is important to note that social polarization by itself does not necessarily lead to violence; Belgium provides

31. Stephen M. Saideman, "Is Pandora's Box Half-Empty or Half-Full? The Limited Virulence of Secessionism and the Domestic Sources of Disintegration," in Lake and Rothchild, *Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement*.
32. Joseph Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); and Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.
33. Weingast, "Constructing Trust," p. 20.

a particularly salient example of a polarized society that manages to conduct politics on a peaceful if not necessarily always harmonious basis, partly because the state remains robust enough to prevent significant information failures, problems of credible commitment, and security dilemmas from arising. Ethnic extremists, in turn, are nearly always present, and they can be expected to become prominent whenever at least one of the strategic dilemmas above is initiated. Analytically, ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs are as much a product as a producer of ethnic fears and are dependent for their "success" upon the underlying strategic dilemmas. Nonetheless, they do play an important role in exacerbating ethnic tensions and propelling societies along the road to violence.

The polarization of society is also magnified by such "non-rational" factors as political memories and myths, on the one hand, and emotions, on the other. Political memories and myths can lead groups to form distorted images of others and see others as more hostile and aggressive than they really are. Such myths are often rooted in actual events, and probably could not be long sustained absent a historical basis. Yet, historical events can, over time, evolve into legends that justify the superiority of one group over another, stimulate desires for retribution, or sustain group hatreds. In Africa, following decolonization as well as in the contemporary period, political memories of past conflict have directly contributed to violent encounters, even instances of genocide.[34] In Eastern Europe, political memories and myths have both defined the groups themselves and stimulated acute fears of mutual exploitation. The Croats and Serbs, formerly citizens within the same state and now enemies, have both used history and religion to support a view of the other as a tight ethnic bloc determined on a destructive course and therefore deserving of pitiless retaliation.

Emotions may also cause individuals and groups to act in exaggerated or potentially "irrational" ways that magnify the chances of conflict. Many analysts point to a deep psychological—perhaps even physiological—need for humans to belong to a group.[35] In the process of drawing distinctions, however, individuals often overstate the goodness of their own group while simultaneously vilifying others. Where such emotional biases exist, groups are likely to interpret the demands of others as outrageous, while seeing their own as

34. René Lemarchand and David Martin, *Selective Genocide in Burundi*, No. 20 (London: Minority Rights Group, 1974).
35. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.

moderate and reasonable; to view the other as inherently untrustworthy, while believing themselves to be reliable; to insist upon adequate safeguards against the possible defection of the other, but interpreting the efforts of others to impose similar restrictions on them as a sign of "bad faith"; to believe that the other is withholding information or deceptive, while they are being open and honest; and so on.

The emotional power of ethnic attachments is typically increased by the unifying effects of what are perceived to be external threats. People who have little in common with others may unite when they feel threatened by external enemies. Thus, the shared identity of the Hutu in Burundi emerged only recently with the Tutsi repressions of 1972.[36] Similarly, in Chechnya, when very disparate interests felt threatened by Russian power, they overcame their differences and made common cause in the face of Russian intervention.

Together, strategic interactions between and within groups can produce environments of fear in which ethnic tensions and conflicts can grow. As Pešić recognizes, it is the future that threatens, but the future is interpreted through the past. While each strategic dilemma alone is sufficient to produce and explain the outbreak of ethnic conflict, they almost always occur simultaneously. Ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs can polarize societies, exacerbating these strategic dilemmas. The tendency toward polarization, in turn, is magnified by political memories and myths and emotions. Combined, these forces create a devastating brew of ethnic rivalry and potential violence.

The Management of Ethnic Conflict

Effective management of ethnic conflicts by local elites and governments and by external states and organizations must reassure minority groups of their physical and cultural safety. To foster stability and constructive ethnic relations, the rights and position of the minority must be secured. Confidence-building measures undertaken by local elites are the most effective instrument to this end, and we discuss these first. In light of group fears and individual ambitions, however, international intervention may be necessary and appropriate either to support local leaders in their confidence-building efforts or to enforce new, externally imposed ethnic contracts. Even so, confidence-building measures and international interventions are imperfect. Unlike other, more optimis-

---

36. Warren Weinstein, "Conflict and Confrontation in Central Africa: The Revolt in Burundi," *Africa Today*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Fall 1972), p. 27.

tic observers, we see no permanent resolutions, only temporary "fixes." In the end, ethnic groups are left without reliable safety nets. There is no form of insurance sufficient to protect against the dilemmas that produce collective fears and violence. We can only hope to contain ethnic fears, not permanently eliminate them.

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES

Confidence-building measures seek to reassure ethnic peoples about their future. To overcome minority fears, confidence-building measures must be appropriate to the needs of those who feel vulnerable to the majority-backed state. The challenge, as I. William Zartman observes, "is to keep the minority/ies from losing."[37] Such safeguards, if handled sensitively over the years, may be able to cope with the central problems of sharing private information and making credible commitments. There are four major trust-building mechanisms for helping ethnic minorities deal with perceived insecurity.

DEMONSTRATIONS OF RESPECT. The security of ethnic peoples is in no small way based on a reciprocity of respect. Unless each side views its opponent as honorable and having legitimate interests, relations are likely to be marred by a history of intended or unintended affronts that widen the social distance between groups and exacerbate fears among ethnic minorities that their children will be relegated indefinitely to second-class status.

Relations in Bosnia, worsened by polarization and increasingly hostile perceptions, have been further aggravated by the contempt Serbs have shown their Muslim adversaries. Describing themselves as the only people in former Yugoslavia "who have the talent, energy, experience, and tradition to form a state," they characterize their adversaries as representing "all that is base, undesirable, and naturally subordinate."[38] In the Sudan, southerners with strong memories of slavery and perceptions of low status bridle at any new evidence of disrespect. Thus, they viewed the Sudanese government's decision to apply Islamic (*Shari'a*) law to them as well as to the Muslims living in the country's north as a confirmation of their second-class status.[39] Their resentment boiled over in 1994, when the minister of state in the president's office, at the mediation talks

37. I. William Zartman, "Putting Humpty-Dumpty Together Again," in Lake and Rothchild, *Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement.*

38. Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of "Ethnic Cleansing"* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1995), pp. 74–75.

39. Amnesty International, *"The Tears of Orphans": No Future Without Human Rights* (New York: Amnesty International, 1995), p. 57.

in Nairobi held by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), allegedly treated both the southerners and the IGADD mediators with contempt when rejecting the southerners' call for self-determination and a secular state.[40]

The fears of ethnic minorities may often be overstated. Minorities in Eastern Europe are described as having "an exaggerated fear of the loss of identity," a legacy of distrust of majority authorities that causes them to make broad demands for legal guarantees. The majorities, fearful that this will start them down the slippery slope toward the breakup of their states, refuse to consent to these demands.[41] But to build confidence it is imperative that dominant state elites take minority ethnic resentments and anxieties into account. Those involved in the management of ethnic disputes can learn much from C.E. Osgood's Graduated and Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension Reduction (GRIT) strategy for easing conflict between the superpowers during the Cold War.[42] His suggested approach of repeated overtures without expectations of an immediate tit-for-tat response could stimulate full negotiations between equals. Unless past wrongs are redressed and the sting of disparagement is removed from current ethnic interactions, internal negotiations will remain clouded by an overhang of bitterness and suspicion; minority uncertainty regarding adversary intentions will then contribute to serious conflicts.

POWER-SHARING. Conflict management requires an effort by the state to build representative ruling coalitions. In conceding to ethnic minority leaders and activists a proportionate share of cabinet, civil service, military, and high party positions, the state voluntarily reaches out to include minority representatives in public affairs, thereby offering the group as a whole an important incentive for cooperation. In South Africa, for example, President Nelson Mandela agreed to include power-sharing provisions in the interim constitution in an effort to reconcile the economically dominant local white community as well as to build confidence among mostly white investors abroad. Significantly, this concession was withdrawn in 1996 with the enactment of a new majority rule constitution. National Party leader F.W. de Klerk was quick to describe the ending of multiparty participation in cabinet decision-making as a "mistake" that would cause a loss of confidence in the country.[43]

40. *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, No. 53 (October 1994), p. 3.
41. Larry L. Watts, "Ethnic Tensions: How the West Can Help," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 92–93.
42. C.E. Osgood, *An Alternative to War or Surrender* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962).
43. "SA Will Pay Price For New Constitution: FW," *ANC Daily News Briefing*, May 9, 1996, p. 9, as transmitted on gopher://gopher.anc.org.za:70/00/anc/newsbrief/1996/news0509.

Power-sharing can be informal (e.g., Kenya, 1960s) or formal (e.g., Nigeria, 1979), and can take place in authoritarian (e.g., Zambia, 1980s) or democratic (e.g., South Africa, mid-1990s) settings. In both Eastern Europe and Africa, there has been a mixed pattern of "hegemonic exchange" regimes: centrally controlled one- or no-party regimes that allow a limited amount of bargaining to take place between state, ethnic, and other elites. Under the authoritarian administrations of Josip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia or Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire, nationality or ethnic representatives met with the president in cabinet sessions, where strong differences were sometimes aired by group spokespersons behind closed doors. The resulting power-sharing systems are quite diverse, yet they have in common a form of coordination in which a somewhat autonomous state and a number of less autonomous ethnic-based and other interests engage in a process of mutual accommodation in accordance with commonly accepted procedural norms, rules, or understandings.[44] These elite power-sharing arrangements are inevitably fragile and temporary because the communal pillars upon which they rest remain firmly in place and resist the integrative pulls that would lead to countrywide loyalties. Even so, while these arrangements last they provide some security for political and ethnic minorities.

With ethnic balances of power constantly evolving and information limited, these arrangements are necessarily transitional ones. If poorly negotiated and implemented, the incomplete ethnic contracts may eventually be rejected by the groups they are designed to protect. The number of people appointed to the cabinet or civil service, for example, is not in and of itself a guarantee of proportional group influence.[45] When not applied with great care, power-sharing arrangements can backfire. Ethnic elites must be prepared to interact with other elite representatives they find personally repugnant, something difficult to do under normal circumstances but especially so where the norms of collaborative politics are not in place. Where majority-dominated states remain unprepared to respond to legitimate minority demands for full participation in decision-making activities, power-sharing schemes are likely to unravel and become themselves a source of grave insecurity.

ELECTIONS. Although elections represent only a brief episode in a larger political process, they can have enormous influence on inter-group collabora-

---

44. Donald Rothchild, "Hegemonial Exchange: An Alternative Model for Managing Conflict in Middle Africa," in Dennis L. Thompson and Dov Ronen, eds., *Ethnicity, Politics, and Development* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1986), p. 72.
45. Robert B. Mattes, "Beyond 'Government and Opposition': An Independent South African Legislature," *Politikon*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (December 1993), p. 76.

tion and conflict. Where favorable circumstances prevail (i.e., an agreement on the rules of the political game, broad participation in the voting process, and a promising economic environment), elections can promote stability. In democratic regimes, where institutionalized uncertainty provides many players with an incentive to participate, the election process can legitimate the outcome.[46] All groups have a reason to organize and, through coalitions with other parties, they are given an opportunity to gain power in the future. This prospect of competing in accordance with the procedural norms of the system can be reassuring to minority interests; not only do they have a chance to advance their individual and collective interests, but they are encouraged by the majority's commitment to the electoral contract. The effect is to preempt conflict.

The implications of elections, however, can also be troubling in multi-ethnic settings. Even where minority groups are represented in the legislature, there is a real possibility that they will remain shut out of the decision-making process. Hence, unless election mechanisms can be linked with other types of political institutions such as multiparty coalitions, regional autonomy, or federalism, they may not be able to provide security against ethnic discrimination. Moreover, when political entrepreneurs seek to outbid their centrist rivals through militant appeals to their ethnic kinsmen, elections can prove very destabilizing, threatening minorities with the possibility of discrimination, exclusion, and even victimization.

Electoral systems have been organized in two main ways to promote inclusive coalitions. First, electoral rules can be set so that candidates are forced to appeal to more than one ethnic group. In an effort to give presidential candidates an incentive to appeal to a broad cross-section of communal groups, for example, both the 1979 and the 1995 (draft) constitutions in Nigeria provided variously that, if there are two candidates for election, a candidate would be deemed to be elected when that person secured a simple majority of the total number of votes cast as well as one-quarter of the votes cast in at least two-thirds of the states. In securing a majority of votes in this multi-ethnic society, moderate appeals, with their overarching themes, were expected to win out over parochial ones.

Second, electoral rules can also be crafted to ensure some minimal representation of all ethnic groups in the society. Those seeking to encourage minority representation in party lists and in ruling coalitions have looked favorably

---

46. Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 26.

on systems of proportional representation (PR). For example, in structuring the elections for the Russian State Duma (the lower chamber of parliament) in 1993, legal drafters provided for a chamber of 450 members, half on the basis of single-member constituencies and half on the basis of PR. Constituencies also vary enormously in size. Such a system ensures the representation of smaller ethnic groups in the State Duma. Similarly, in South Africa, the African National Congress agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to use PR during the transition period to give racial and ethnic minorities a sense of security.[47] Although the PR system seemed cumbersome and failed to generate close links between a member of parliament and his or her constituents, ANC leaders nonetheless agreed to continue use of this mechanism for electing members to the National Assembly under the 1996 Constitution.

The way that state elites structure electoral arrangements is likely to prove critical in building confidence in minority circles. A broad-based electoral formula, like that of Nigeria, and proportional representation are two possible ways of encouraging minority ethnic participation and inclusion; yet they are likely to endure only as long as they retain support among key groups and state elites. If the majority shifts its concern away from the values of representativeness, a change in electoral rules can take place. Unless this change is handled fairly and with extreme sensitivity, it can be perceived by minority groups as inimical to their interests. As a consequence, considerable experience is required before minorities come to see electoral laws as reliable foundations for their security.

REGIONAL AUTONOMY AND FEDERALISM. Political and administrative decentralization can play a role in managing political conflict. By enabling local and regional authorities to wield a degree of autonomous power, elites at the political center can promote confidence among local leaders. Measures on decentralization, regional autonomy, and federalism featured in peace negotiations in Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Cyprus, Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa. In each, they provided insurgent militias with an important incentive for responding positively to the government or third-party mediator's proposals for settling the conflict. The U.S.-brokered peace initiative in Bosnia achieved a key breakthrough in the September 1995 negotiations, for example, when the Bosnian government agreed to recognize an autonomous Bosnian Serb entity, called Republika Srpska. In exchange, Serbia and Croatia accepted

---

47. Timothy D. Sisk, "South Africa Seeks New Ground Rules," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 1993), p. 87.

the legal existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina with its present borders and endorsed the division of the country, 51 percent of the territory to the Bosnian government and Bosnian Croats, and 49 percent to the Bosnian Serbs. All three parties perceived control of Bosnia's territory to be critically important for their survival once peace came into effect.

In attempting to create a new balance between state and society, groups turn to decentralization as a means of placing institutional limitations on unbridled central authority. Politically marginalized groups have vivid memories of excessive state penetration and a continuing fear of majority domination. Decentralization and the authority these schemes allow local elites can, therefore, become confidence-building mechanisms that safeguard the place of minorities in the larger society. In Ethiopia, for example, President Meles Zenawi looks to a scheme of ethnic federalism as a means of reversing the repressive, hegemonic practices of previous governments that have led to internal wars.[48] The 1994 Constitution gives the nations making up Ethiopia wide powers, including an unconditional right of self-determination and secession.

Nevertheless, experiments with decentralized systems in India, Pakistan, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Sudan, and Ethiopia reveal serious practical difficulties in securing majority-backed state acceptance for these attempts to insulate minority interests from central authority. Determined to prevent the division of the state, public officials have taken firm action to avert a weakening of control. In extreme cases, they have revoked previous concessions. Thus, as Yugoslavia began to disintegrate in 1989, Milošević rescinded the autonomous provincial status within Serbia that Tito had given to largely Albanian-populated Kosovo. Sudan's President Gaafar el-Nimeiry, who had been the main advocate of political accommodation with the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement insurgents in 1972, backtracked on his commitments formalized in the Addis Ababa accords and in the late 1970s began to dismantle the federal compromise; to placate hard-line, Muslim elements within his government, Nimeiry intervened in southern regional elections, changed regional boundaries, redivided the southern region, applied *Shari'a* law to non-Muslims, and ultimately abrogated the agreement itself. In both Yugoslavia and Sudan, revocation of concessions on autonomy heightened tensions and led to new violence.

---

48. Cameron McWhirter and Gur Melamede, "Ethiopia: The Ethnicity Factor," *Africa Report*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (September/October, 1992) p. 33.

While regional autonomy and federalism have been used as safeguards, they have had, in some instances, unintended consequences that have actually increased conflict. Despite efforts to decentralize power in South Africa and Ethiopia, the fiscal dominance of the political center has tended to undercut the significance of regional authorities. Moreover, efforts to delineate boundaries have increased conflict between ethno-regional identity groups. In contemporary Russia, the arbitrary way in which internal boundaries divide ethnic peoples has been a major source of tension.[49] In Ethiopia, the regional boundaries set up by the government appear to favor Tigray and the Afars, at the expense of the formerly dominant Amhara and the Somali Isaks in the Awash Valleyland. Unless carefully crafted, decentralization schemes may worsen rather than improve inter-ethnic relations.

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES EVALUATED. Confidence-building measures are potentially creative instruments by which states can reassure ethnic minorities. They indicate a sympathetic concern on the part of those in power to the fears and uncertainties of minorities. By acknowledging and showing respect for difference and by agreeing to share resources, state positions, and political power with exposed and vulnerable groups, these measures reduce the perceived risks of association and provide incentives for cooperation with other groups. They can also become the basis over time for a shared sense of common fate among diverse communities. States seeking ethnic accommodations have used confidence-building measures effectively in the past, and they will continue to do so in the future. The international community should encourage states at risk of significant ethnic conflict to make use of confidence-building measures.

However, such confidence-building measures represent conflict management, not conflict resolution. They can reduce some of the factors giving rise to ethnic fears, but they do not alter the basic dilemmas that cause these fears in the first place. The risks in ethnic encounters remain in place, even if papered over by concessions. Because there is always the possibility that groups will adopt more threatening forms of interaction, these confidence-building measures never eliminate the information failures, problems of credible commitment, and security dilemmas that are embedded in ethnic encounters. As Adam Przeworski astutely observes, "if sovereignty resides with the people, the

---

49. Gail W. Lapidus and Renée de Nevers, eds., *Nationalism, Ethnic Identity and Conflict Management in Russia Today* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Center for International Security and Arms Control, 1995), p. 3.

people can decide to undermine all the guarantees reached by politicians around a negotiating table. Even the most institutionalized guarantees give at best a high degree of assurance, never certainty."[50]

EXTERNAL INTERVENTION

If states fail to restrain the incentives for violence rooted in the strategic interactions of groups, it is necessary to turn to the international environment and ask whether external intervention can safeguard minorities against their worst fears. For many observers, sovereignty is linked to responsibility: state elites are expected to guarantee minority rights and provide the means for establishing and maintaining regularized patterns of state-society and inter-ethnic relations. The state, with its monopoly of force, is often in a position, as one South African mediator described it in 1995, to "enforce stability" between local warring parties (in this case, in the East Rand townships in his country). But who will intercede if the state is unable or unwilling to secure the safety of its minority peoples? What forms will this intervention take? Which of the interventions, if any, are likely to have a significant impact on intra-state conflicts?

The principle of sovereignty has never been articulated or respected in the clear-cut manner often assumed by scholars of international relations. As Stephen D. Krasner and Daniel K. Froats demonstrate, states have a long history of intervention in the ethnic (and religious) affairs of others.[51] Many of the treaties settling European affairs in the aftermath of World War I contained provisions obligating states to protect the political and religious rights of minorities within their borders. More recently, the United Nations Charter affirmed an international commitment to basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali now believes that "the time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty has passed."[52]

Nonetheless, since 1945 there has been a strong insistence by many countries on the protection of national autonomy afforded by the juridical principle of sovereignty. This emphasis on internal autonomy has often been strongest where states themselves were weakest.[53] Yet today, ethnic conflicts and their

---

50. Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, p. 79.
51. Stephen D. Krasner and Daniel K. Froats, "The Westphalian Model and Minority-Rights Guarantees in Europe," in Lake and Rothchild, *Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement*. See also Krasner, "Compromising Westphalia," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Winter 1995/96), pp. 115–151.
52. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace* (New York: United Nations, 1992), p. 9.
53. Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg. "Why Africa's Weak States Persist," *World Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (October 1982), pp. 1–24.

possible spread have thrust issues of "humanitarian" intervention onto the policy agendas of the United States and many other countries. As Edmond Keller indicates, even in Africa, where the norm of juridical sovereignty has been strong, there is a new willingness on the part of state leaders to entertain limitations on the notion of sovereignty, but it remains an open question whether these leaders will be prepared to sanction international interventions directed against their own countries.[54]

External intervention takes three broad forms: noncoercive intervention, coercive intervention, and third-party mediation during both the negotiation and implementation stages. We look briefly at each of these forms, drawing conclusions in each case about their anticipated effects on intra-state conflicts.

NONCOERCIVE INTERVENTION. A sense of alarm over the violation of minority rights taking place in other countries has, at times, prompted outside states and multilateral organizations to protest infractions or exert pressure on the transgressors. Western governments, encouraged by their domestic publics to denounce breaches of human rights in Bosnia, Chechnya, Rwanda, and Sudan, have criticized these abuses through quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy and at public fora.

Assertions of international norms are important in raising the costs of unacceptable behavior, especially when their advocates offer an alternative set of interests around which defectors can mobilize and challenge the ensconced ethnic leaders.[55] States are also in a strong position to use inclusion in or exclusion from the international community to reward or punish regimes and ethnic leaders who deviate from internationally accepted norms. The promises of inclusion or the pains of exclusion can at times create strong incentives to behave in a more responsible fashion. Thus Milošević's desire to be accepted by Europeans and North Americans enabled Western diplomats to influence his behavior at the bargaining table, even causing him to make concessions on the emotionally charged issue of Bosnian government control over a unified Sarajevo. Similarly, conditions on membership in international organizations appear to be mitigating ethnic conflicts in Hungary and Romania, while Turkey's desire for acceptance in Europe may be limiting its actions against its Kurdish minority.

---

54. Edmond J. Keller, "Transnational Ethnic Conflict in Africa," in Lake and Rothchild, *Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement*.
55. V.P. Gagnon, Jr., "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), p. 139.

In South Africa, external protests and sanctions raised the costs of doing business, access to technology and raw materials, and travel. Sanctions physically punished the regime, something that became painfully evident in South Africa's loss of dominance in the air war over Angola, brought on in part by the air force's inability to secure spare parts. The symbolic impact of sanctions was also important because it represented a clear statement of sympathy for black hardship and moral disapproval of apartheid policies by the international community.[56] Above all, international condemnation challenged state and governmental legitimacy. While the costs of sanctions were discomforting and burdensome, they did not hurt the main body of the white constituency sufficiently to alter priorities, until de Klerk's remarkable change of heart on negotiating with the anti-apartheid opposition in the early 1990s.[57]

Given the extreme emotionalism over security issues that brings aggressive ethnic leaders to the fore in the first place, we are skeptical that external appeals, exhortations, and pressures will in and of themselves dissuade determined elites from their abusive courses. Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, Bosnian Serb military commander Ratko Mladić, and their ilk remain sufficiently insulated from world pressures that what transpires at diplomatic meetings or in the global press may have little immediate impact on them or their militant followers.

Noncoercive interventions can be helpful in raising the costs of purely ethnic appeals and in structuring the incentives of group leaders prepared to accept international norms for the purposes of recognition, acceptance, and inclusion in the international community. Where conflicts are intense, however, exhortations and international warnings may not deter or end violence. The most that noncoercive intervention can do in such situations is to create a climate in which ethnic appeals and violence are perceived by all as illegitimate and, therefore, marginally less likely to be used.

COERCIVE INTERVENTION. The rise in ethnic conflict today creates new demands and opportunities for coercive intervention by outside states and international organizations.[58] External interventions have two primary effects. First, intervention can alter the internal balance of ethnic power and may lead groups

---

56. Harry R. Strack, *Sanctions: The Case of Rhodesia* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1978).
57. Sisk, *Democratization in South Africa*.
58. For discussions of the motivations of outside states to intervene in ethnic conflicts, see Michael E. Brown, "Causes and Implications of Ethnic Conflict," in Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, pp. 16–20, and Robert Cooper and Mats Berdal, "Outside Intervention in Ethnic Conflicts," in ibid., p. 197.

to moderate their demands. Except perhaps where the sides have reached a "hurting stalemate" and the purpose of the intervention is exclusively to separate the forces and keep the peace, interventions always have political implications.[59] Even in Somalia, where negotiations on establishing a transitional national council led to hopes for a settlement in 1993, the initial humanitarian mission eventually favored one claimant to power (Ali Mahdi Mohamed) over the other (Mohamed Farah Aideed), ultimately causing the politicization of the mission.[60] Typically favoring, by design or default, the weaker side in any internal conflict, external powers reduce the stronger side's chances for success. This, in turn, restrains the stronger party's demands. To the extent that such restraint takes hold, intervention can improve the prospects for agreement. However, the weaker side is likely to increase its demands and ask for more at the bargaining table as its prospects of failure decline and its chances for success improve.[61] For instance, once the NATO countries intervened decisively in September 1995 on behalf of the Bosnian government, and against the Bosnian Serb forces, the latter—pressured by Milošević—quickly moderated their demands and moved towards accepting the territorial partition they had earlier rejected.[62] At the same time, however, the Croats saw new opportunities on the battlefield and at the negotiating table, and the United States and its allies had to exert pressure on the Bosnian government and Croatia not to exploit their increased leverage. With both effects occurring simultaneously in any intervention, the "bargaining gap" between the parties may remain as wide as ever. Unless pressure is exerted on both sides to moderate their demands, intervention by itself will not necessarily enhance the prospects for agreement.

The second primary effect of intervention is to provide guarantees for new ethnic contracts between the warring parties, at least during an interim period. As discussed above, problems of credible commitment hinder the efforts of groups to resolve their differences peacefully. The primary attraction of external

---

59. On "hurting stalemates," see I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). On the inevitable political implications of intervention, see Caleb Carr, "The Consequences of Somalia," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 1–4.
60. John L. Hirsch and Robert B. Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope: Reflections on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995).
61. Donald Wittman, "How a War Ends: A Rational Model Approach," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (December 1979), pp. 743–763.
62. Milošević's role in the October 1995 negotiations carried with it an implied threat: if the Bosnian Serbs refused to be more accommodating at the bargaining table, their Serb kinsmen across the border could further reduce their military support.

intervention is that an outside state can enforce an agreement, thereby provid-ing the necessary credibility that is otherwise lacking. Indeed, when the future risk of exploitation is high, but the declining group is still strong enough to possess some chance of victory, outside enforcers may be the only way to ensure ethnic peace.[63] Thus, in Namibia in 1989, the third-party enforcer was in a position to raise the costs of breaking agreements by monitoring the implementation process, highlighting violations of the peace agreement, and focusing an international spotlight on any breaches that occurred.[64] The lack of any equally effective third-party enforcer in neighboring Angola following the signing of the Bicesse accords, and UNITA President Jonas Savimbi's poor showing in the first round of the 1992 elections, increased incentives to defect from the agreement and resume the civil war.

The promise of the post–Cold War world is that the great powers, freed from the shackles of superpower competition, can now intervene to mitigate ethnic conflicts by providing external guarantees of social order. If the warring parties themselves cannot make credible commitments to uphold their pacts, external powers can lead the groups to peaceful solutions by enforcing any agreement they might reach. The paradox of the post–Cold War world, however, is that absent the bipolar competition that drove them into the far reaches of the globe, the United States and other powers now lack the political will necessary to make a sustained commitment to this role.

The key issue in determining the success of any external guarantee is the commitment of the international community. In a way not sufficiently appre-ciated by current policy makers in Washington and elsewhere, external guar-antees work only when the local parties to the conflict believe that the outside powers are resolved to enforce the ethnic contract in a fair manner into the indefinite future. The behavior of the external powers today is not the crucial factor. Rather, a more fundamental question is whether the warring parties or potential combatants believe the external powers will be there to protect them tomorrow, and in the days and years after that. Absent a belief in the fair-mind-edness and stamina of the external powers, intervention in any form will fail to mitigate the conflict.

---

63. Stephen J. Stedman, *Peacemaking in Civil Wars: International Mediation in Zimbabwe, 1974–1980* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1991); and Barbara F. Walter, "The Resolution of Civil Wars: Why Negotiations Fail," unpublished paper, Columbia University, 1995.
64. Virginia P. Fortna, "Success and Failure in Southern Africa: Peacekeeping in Namibia and Angola," in Donald C.F. Daniel and Bradd C. Hayes, eds., *Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), pp. 282–299.

Unfortunately, even countries with strong interests in intervening often find themselves unable to offer credible external guarantees. Countries vitally affected by the fighting or the outcome either tend to be partisan or are perceived by the combatants as partisan, as was the case with France's intervention in Rwanda in 1994. One or both sides to the conflict, therefore, will doubt the willingness of the outside power to enforce the new ethnic contract in an evenhanded manner, and they will be less likely to reach an effective and enforceable agreement. However, when outside powers have interests in a stable outcome, rather than in the victory or loss of either side, they may be perceived by all as fair-minded facilitators. Britain's role in Zimbabwe in the 1970s is a positive example of an interested party able to work with a coalition of external mediators to push negotiations ahead to a successful outcome.

Countries with weak interests in the conflict, on the other hand, will tend to lack or will be perceived as lacking the political stamina to enforce any new ethnic contract into the future. The United States was unwilling to bear any substantial cost in human lives to guarantee the peace in Somalia, for instance. There are many reasons why states might possess only weak interests in guaranteeing a new ethnic conflict. Most important, political instability abroad is typically broad but shallow in its effects, producing incentives for states to seek to free ride on the efforts of others.[65] This is one plausible interpretation of the hesitancy of the United States in taking a leadership role in Bosnia. In this view, Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton held back hoping that the Europeans would step forward and carry the financial and military burden; only when the Europeans proved unprepared to assume the costs did the United States take the lead.

Weak commitments produce ambiguous policies that may, in the end, exacerbate rather than resolve conflicts. Public commitments encourage the weaker party to believe that the external power supports it, thereby prompting the group to fight on and hold out for a better deal than its position on the battlefield warrants.[66] Ambiguity and vacillation, however, may simultaneously persuade the stronger party that the external power does not possess sufficient stamina, and that it too may improve its position by continuing to fight. This ambivalent commitment is the true tragedy of the current United States policy in the Balkans. One of the most important lessons from this

65. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965).
66. Djilas, "Fear thy Neighbor: The Breakup of Yugoslavia," p. 102.

analysis is that if external powers are going to intervene in ethnic conflicts, either alone or in concert with others, they must do so in a way that is credible to the groups involved. An external guarantee that the parties expect will evaporate is no guarantee at all.

THIRD-PARTY MEDIATION. Given the limitations of confidence-building measures and external interventions, there are few alternatives to negotiations if both sides are to be brought into the solution. For a mutually satisfactory peace to take place, a two-step negotiating process is essential: first, among the key elements within each group, and then between the groups themselves. Operating rules must be hammered out in these talks regarding inclusive coalitions, proportionality in recruitment and allocations, autonomy, provisions on electoral competition, and so forth. The ensuing negotiations are likely to be protracted and difficult, largely because the various factions and groups lack a clear chain of command (making commitments difficult to produce) and because they understand fully that the terms they accept will cast a long shadow over their future. But if each of the parties concludes that its alternatives are limited, its present course unduly costly, and its stake in its rival's willingness to cooperate with an agreement significant, they may then begin to negotiate in good faith. External mediators can play an important role in facilitating negotiations by encouraging adversaries to open up channels of communication, to reconsider their alternatives, and to opt for peaceful, negotiated solutions. A mediator's ability to influence the strategies of the adversaries must not be overstated; nevertheless, the ability of a third party to make effective use of pressures and incentives can prove decisive, especially if the parties to the conflict have nowhere else to go.

In intense ethnic disputes, mediators can use a variety of noncoercive and coercive incentives to increase the information available to the adversaries, facilitate a change in their strategies, or find a way to save face. Noncoercive incentives extend benefits or rewards for compliance, while coercive incentives punish or threaten to punish a targeted actor to bring it into line with preferred types of political behavior. Provided that the demands of the two sides are negotiable and neither party can anticipate a military victory, mediators can make use of a package of carrots and sticks in the hopes that the targeted party (or parties) will accept a compromise and thus allow some degree of mutual cooperation to materialize.

Normally, noncoercive incentives will be preferred by third parties, because of their low cost and expected impact. Thus, mediators frequently make use of sidepayments to enlarge the pie and alter the payoff structure, thereby enhanc-

ing the benefits of making concessions (as occurred most dramatically in the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations at Camp David in 1978). Third parties can also influence the choices of ethnic minorities by guaranteeing them against possible future abuses at the hands of the majority after an agreement has been reached.

However, when ethnic conflicts grow in intensity and can no longer be resolved by means of rewards, it sometimes becomes necessary for the third party to force movement toward cooperation by means of threats or punishments. These coercive incentives become increasingly punitive as they move from pressure to economic sanctions to military intervention, as occurred at different stages in the Bosnian confrontation. In the contemporary period, only a coalition of mediators seems likely to have the political capacity to create the mix of noncoercive and coercive incentives necessary to overcome a stalemate and move the parties toward a negotiated settlement.

But the scope for third-party initiative at both the negotiation and implementation stages is highly circumscribed. Internal wars are particularly difficult to negotiate, largely because ethnic enmities tend to be so deep and the stakes so high. Data on negotiations indicate that settlements are difficult to achieve and at least as difficult to maintain, even where a third party is prepared to step between the adversaries. Roy Licklider, largely reconfirming earlier studies by Stephen Stedman and Paul Pillar, finds that only 14 out of 57 civil wars between 1945 and 1993 were settled through negotiations.[67] Even with its focus on opening channels of communication and facilitating the flow of information, third-party mediation cannot wholly eliminate potential information failures. The conflicting groups are bound by the same incentives not to reveal all of their private information, even to third parties. Moreover, problems of credible commitment loom large. Barbara Walter suggests that inter-state wars are easier to bring to a negotiated conclusion because the two parties remain on opposite sides of a border; in internal wars, the disputants must re-merge themselves into a single unit and, as a result, face more difficult problems of credible commitment.[68]

The difficulties normally associated with mediation are compounded by the obstacles to implementation. Several laboriously negotiated agreements have

---

67. Roy Licklider, "The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars, 1945–1993," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (September 1995), p. 684; Stedman, *Peacemaking in Civil Wars*, pp. 5–7; Paul R. Pillar, *Negotiating Peace: War Termination as a Bargaining Process* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 25.
68. Walter, "The Resolution of Civil Wars."

been signed only to fall apart at the implementation stage—for example, in Ethiopia and Eritrea (1962), Sudan (1982), Uganda (1985), Angola (1975, 1992), and Rwanda (1994). A large part of the responsibility for these failures lies with adversary parties and their inability to make credible and reliable commitments. Their distrust of one another's intentions was so deep that the peace agreement crumbled when ambiguity on security-related matters opened the way to renewed confrontation.

However, the failure of these agreements is also partly attributable to the unwillingness of the international community to provide mediators with the economic, logistical, police, and military support needed to oversee the processes of disarmament, integration of the armed forces, repatriation of refugees, and holding of general elections. In addition, the guarantees made to one or more rivals by foreign governments and multilateral organizations have come to lack credibility as local actors now expect the domestic publics of the third-party mediators to lose interest over time in far-off conflicts and retreat from commitments made at the high point of the struggle.

As internal wars reach a hurting stalemate and leaders on both sides perceive an "intolerable situation" with little expectation of military victory, fatigued parties may come to the table and bargain in earnest.[69] Despite the emotionalism and organizational imperatives surrounding civil wars, a number of them— including those in Cambodia, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, and possibly now Chechnya and Bosnia—have been or are close to being settled by means of negotiations. One must not anticipate too much from mediatory efforts, but a grim outlook is also not appropriate and could be self-fulfilling.

THE LIMITS OF INTERVENTION. External interventions, whether they are non-coercive, coercive, mediatory, or—as is common—a combination of the three, are not likely to solve the underlying strategic dilemmas that produce ethnic fear and violence. Information failures remain possible, despite the efforts of outside actors to facilitate communication and protect the parties from the potentially disastrous consequences of revealing private information. Enforcing ethnic contracts depends upon the credibility of the external parties, who often have far less at stake in the conflict than the warring groups themselves. External actors can seek to raise the costs of using force, in general, and preemptive uses of force, in particular, by punishing groups that strike first; such initiatives or the threat of such initiatives may have a moderating effect

---

69. Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, p. 232.

on the security dilemma. Through early action, they may also be able to shape military doctrines and force structures in groups beginning to prepare for self-defense. Nevertheless, once incentives to use force preemptively are in place, outsiders can do little to restrain the security dilemma. In the final analysis, conflict management requires an effort by the local parties to engage in efforts to work out acceptable rules of interaction. External intervention does not by itself create a desire among the parties to restore normal relations. This is not to say that international efforts to contain conflict are not important, only that containment by itself is not a solution.

Toward Practical Initiatives

Most of the time, most ethnic groups live side by side with one another comfortably and amicably. Even in cases where ethnic minorities might otherwise be at risk, states have promoted stable ethnic relations and made concessions on minority group inclusion, participation, autonomy, and access to resources. However, an awareness that regimes can always change their preferences and retract these concessions leaves minorities fearful of the future. Information failures, problems of credible commitment, and the security dilemma lurk in the background of all ethnically divided polities. Conflict always remains a possibility.

Where an element of local anarchy is present and the state is at least potentially weak, a spiral of negative encounters that leads to violence remains a very real possibility. Information failures occur as the state loses its ability to arbitrate between factions, and as groups hold back information and suspect others of doing the same. Problems of credible commitment arise as ethnic contracts collapse and groups come to fear that others will not uphold their promises. Incentives to preempt drive groups to fight first and seek the basis for compromise later. In situations of increasing state weakness, appeals by ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs may awaken long dormant "malignant nationalisms" and lead to escalating violence.[70] In multi-ethnic polities with past histories of conflict and distrust, the social fabric can be very weak and easily torn apart.

In their fear, political minorities, recognizing the state's limited capacity to ensure their physical and cultural safety, look outward to the international

---

70. Stephen Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter 1994), p. 8.

community for protection. They hope the international community will restore a balance of power and hence make systematic, state-sanctioned ethnic killing too costly for the hard-line majority leadership to condone. The international response, however, has all too often been feeble and unconvincing.

In the end, and despite the limits on international interventions discussed above, there can be no substitute for greater global commitment and involvement. The international community has already been involved at nearly every stage of some confrontation around the globe. This is a hopeful sign. But so far, many of the international responses have been conducted separately, sporadically, and outside of any comprehensive strategy for achieving ethnic peace, thereby limiting their effectiveness. Recognizing the inherent limits on the ability of international interventions to solve the strategic dilemmas we have identified, as well as the limits of public support in outside states, we recommend three specific avenues of action.

MANAGE INFORMATION

Given the importance of private information and the beliefs that groups hold about the intentions of others, one of the most effective policy instruments in the hands of international actors today is to ensure that objective, unbiased, and balanced information is made widely available in states threatened with intense conflict. This will require a continuing but largely preventive effort. As conflict escalates, outside states and international organizations can consider jamming radios that make inflammatory appeals, as did Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines in Rwanda. After the crisis has eased, external actors can use a variety of means, such as radio, fax, and the internet, for sharing information with the warring parties to help verify compliance with new ethnic contracts.

ASSIST "FAILING" STATES

Growing state weakness is a symptom of the strategic dilemmas discussed above. As information failures occur, problems of credible commitment arise, and security dilemmas begin to take hold, groups either turn away from the state or attempt to seize it to further their own quest for security. A decrease in a state's capacity to arbitrate between groups and enforce ethnic contracts is a clear herald of violence. Preventing the breakdown of the state can, in turn, help mitigate the potential for violence. External actors should seek to ensure that confidence-building measures are in place and that elites live up to minimum standards of legal order and political and human rights. The support of the international community for the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa is

a prime example. Trade, financial aid, and other benefits from inclusion in the international community should be linked to the maintenance of minimum international standards of domestic order. In advance of crises, international bodies should also assemble data banks, early warning systems, advance plans for possible mediators, units for peacemaking and enforcement, and personnel to assist in the creation of unified armies. It will be necessary to provide a solid financial basis for such international actions, but the costs will be small compared to the long-run benefits of reduced conflict.

INVEST IN IMPLEMENTATION

Negotiating a peace agreement between warring ethnic groups is only half the job. Implementing the agreement is just as important, and can be more difficult and complex than the negotiations. None of the strategies of external involvement discussed above "solves" the problem of ethnic conflict. Even if external pressure brings the parties to the table and produces an agreement, the underlying strategic dilemmas remain in place. A stable peace can only arise as effective institutions of government are re-established, as the state once again begins to mediate effectively between distrustful ethnic groups, and as the parties slowly gain confidence in the safeguards contained within their new ethnic contracts. This necessarily involves an element of state-building and the possibility of forcible intervention to protect minorities. It is also a slow, incremental process that is likely to require years to bear fruit.

The United States and other countries, individually or collectively, should invest substantially in implementing peace agreements. The very fact that rival parties have consented to an agreement indicates they have jointly come to accept certain outcomes and understandings. At this stage, implementation becomes the decisive factor in the successful creation of internal order. Even when backed by a peacekeeping force, implementing a peace agreement involves a limited commitment on the part of an individual intervener or a coalition of interveners; they are committed to this agreement, not others, and need not fall prey to the inevitable pressures for "mission creep." Successful implementation offers potentially large returns. The alternative is renewed or, in some cases, unending conflict.