Is Ethnic Conflict Avoidable?

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From the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 to the current violence in Burma, ethnic conflict has repeatedly plagued the world through its destruction of communities. The following research within this essay focuses on why violent ethnic conflict is unavoidable, by assessing current approaches to avoidance. Before discussing preventive methods, it is essential to grasp an understanding of what this essay will define 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic conflict' to be. A facile definition of ethnicity can be understood as the group in which an individual defines themselves under. Banks and Fenton however, contest this simplistic perception, offering comprehensive explanations. Banks' research suggests that to truly understand the phenomenon, ethnicity has to be regarded as a collection of multiple social and hereditary factors. There are a broad range of factors he considers, including biological relationships, achievements, identity and descent which, all influence an individual's social construction (Banks 1996, p.190). In more simplified terms, Banks suggests ethnicity is an intellectual construct effected by social factors. Fenton's research in comparison supports the idea of ethnicity being socially constructed by arguing "the social construction of descent and culture, mobilization of descent and culture and the meanings and implications of classification systems built around them" have an impact on what creates one's ethnicity (Fenton 2010, p.3).

Fenton's analysis of the concept further suggests that ethnicity is socially constructed, while emphasising the impact of descent and culture. Altogether his arguments indicate that constructions have led to the formation of communities, in which separate ethnicities are based. Taking into consideration both Banks and Fenton's research, ethnicity can be understood as the common identities in which separate socially constructed communities define themselves under. With this definition of ethnicity in mind, ethnic conflict can be interpreted as rising tensions between two separate communities because of their separate ethnic identities. Violent ethnic conflict, can be regarded as the escalation of these tensions into physical violence.

Following these definitions, this essay will demonstrate why violent ethnic conflict is not avoidable in some cases. Within section one I will briefly provide the causes of ethnic conflict to reveal what increases tensions. After establishing the sources of conflict, section two will contain an assessment of preventative methods to avoiding the outlined causes. The possible methods of avoidance that will be considered are economic development, effective management, intervention and diplomacy. Section three will consider the impact the discussed approaches have had on avoiding conflict in Darfur, Sudan to further demonstrate why ethnic conflict is unavoidable.

Section 1: Academics on the Causes of Ethnic Conflict

Resources

Wegenast and Basedau's research suggests that fractionalised communities fused with natural resources is a recipe for escalating conflict (Wegenast and Basedau 2013, p. 433). Their arguments firstly, adopts the notion that the existence of multiple ethnic groups leads to division. Violent conflict however, becomes more of a possibility when large amounts of natural resources are available. Ethnically divided communities will fight for the ownership of resources, demonstrating how conflict tensions can rise over resources. Wegenast and Basedau's research is useful for they provide evidence which demonstrates there is a strong correlation between resources, ethnic fractionalisation and violence (Wegenast and Basedau, p.443). Their results nevertheless are limited due to a lack of consideration of the effects of resource scarcity.

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Hampson and Malone in contrast consider this aspect, by arguing that a lack of sufficient resources within impoverished communities can lead to ethnic conflict (Hampson and Malone 2002, p.79). They consider a range of alternative factors including high population growth, uneven land distribution and other economic influences as triggers for conflict (Hampson and Malone 2002, p.79). Along with Wegenast and Basedau's research, the preceding arguments provide evidence suggesting the competition for resources and the existence of resource scarcity both contribute to causing conflict.

Security Dilemma

Barry Posen's research offers analysis into why we should consider the security dilemma as another factor causing ethnic conflict. Influenced heavily by realist explanations, he suggests that conditions of anarchy cause insecurity, which can lead to conflict (Posen 1993, p.27). This possibility of conflict is increased in states with failed regimes due to the security dilemma. The security dilemma occurs when one groups attempt to increase its own security leads to greater insecurity for another, creating pressure that can lead to conflict (Posen 1993, p.28). Using evidence from Post-Soviet regimes, ethnic violence erupts as groups within failed states attempt to make themselves secure. Posen suggests this can occur unintentionally, where behaviours such as obtaining weapons for protection can be interpreted as a violent gesture to others (Posen 1993, p.28). This analysis is useful for it allows us to consider the security dilemma as a cause of ethnic conflict in weak states. Approaches to avoidance must include ways to make groups within weak states feel less threatened (Posen 1993, p.43).

Elite Theory

Although Posen's research is useful in establishing causes, De Figueiredo and Weingast argue his explanations are limited (Walter and Snyder 1999 p. 262). Their assertion is supported due to Posen's focus on conflict within failed regimes. In contrast, De Figueiredo and Weingast offer greater thought into causes, suggesting political elites are another cause of conflict. The elite theory proposes that political elites initiate conflict for political gains (Walter and Snyder 1999 p.261). De Figueiredo and Weingast argue that weak leaders use conflict as a tool to regain loss of power. Using the conflict in Yugoslavia as an example, their model for establishing causes is useful. In application, they demonstrate how Slobodan Milosevic's assertions were essential in inducing the fear that led to violent behaviour in Yugoslavia (Walter and Snyder 1999 p.265). De Figueiredo and Weingast's research therefore demonstrate why approaches to avoidance must also consider ways to handle political elites.

Section 2: Approaches to Avoidance

Economic Development

The research within section one revealed that an abundance of resources and resource scarcity are both influential factors that can cause conflict. As a consequence, many academics within this field have proposed economic development to prevent the competitive effects resources can cause among populations. Economic development as a preventative measure can therefore be analysed to demonstrate whether or not ethnic conflict is avoidable.

The engagement of the United Nations and its wider agencies can be employed to counter the negative effects resources can cause (Hampson and Malone 2002, p.77). Agencies such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Financial Institutions (IFI) should be utilized, due to their established programs of aid, development and capacity building. The UNDP's capacity building program delivers a wide range of goals such as strengthening institutions and improving individual rights in underdeveloped communities (United Nations 2009, p.5). Furthermore, Hampson and Malone argue the UN as an institution is a successful monitoring mechanism. The possibility of conflict can be reduced, due to the Security Council's ability to implement sanctions on governments, as well as intervene in the form of peacekeeping forces to decrease tensions (Hampson and Malone 2002, p.85). Their arguments are useful for they demonstrate potential successful methods of avoidance. Significant analysis into Hampson and Malone's suggestions however, demonstrate the difficulties in avoiding conflict.

Engagement of the UN as outlined above is successful in its ability to send peacekeeping forces where conflicts tend

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to rise. Nevertheless, actions such as the implementation of peacekeeping forces are reactionary and used after a conflict has already started. Peacekeeping can only be considered to be a preventative method if used prior to the escalation of violence. As a method, it also carries political implications which discourages some states. In practice member states have avoided action despite evidence of ethnic tensions rising, such as Rwanda 1994, where a lack of strategic gains prevented a response by the international community (Hampson and Malone 2002, p.81). Reuveney et al's research on resources and conflict, provides further evidence which demonstrates that external aid is not useful in ending conflict (Reuveney et al 2011, p.709). Their evidence suggests that third party aid tends to escalate conflicts due to aid being used to acquire weapons and draft recruits (Reuveney et al 2011, p.709). Studies like theirs verify why Hampson and Malone's economic development proposal fails to provide substantial evidence on how development programs can prevent resource stemmed conflict.

Buchanan also considers the possibility of avoiding conflict, through the removal of economic instability within a state (Buchanan 20, p.199). This method of prevention combats resource conflicts by creating smaller economic gaps between separate ethnic groups. As a consequence, increased wealth cannot be utilized by political elites as a reasoning to enter violent conflicts (Buchanan 20, p.199). In theory, the removal of all economic instability within a state will undoubtedly reduce tensions between groups over resources. In practice however, Buchanan herself acknowledges the improbability of producing an economic program which combats all grievances between groups (Buchanan 20, p. 199). Reuveney et al's research further contradicts these assumptions for their evidence deduces, increased development only prolongs the existence of conflicts (Reuveney et al 2011, p.708). Their research is extremely useful within this analysis for their game theory model of conflict demonstrates that further extraction of resources intensifies conflicts within a state (Reuveney et al 2011, p.698). Their empirical evidence suggests that development programs that result in the production of more resources, eventually lead to future conflicts over those same resources. When considering economic development as a preventive method it is therefore difficult to suggest it avoids conflicts due to the long-term negative implications increased resources can cause.

Effective Management and Intervention

Attributing the security dilemma as the main cause of ethnic conflict, presumes that ethnic fear itself is what causes conflict. In consideration of combatting ethnic fear, Lake and Rothschild's propose effective management and third-party intervention. Effective management is described as a method that includes "Demonstrations of respect, power-sharing, elections engineered to produce the interdependence of groups, and the establishment of regional autonomy and federalism" (Lake and Rothschild 1996, p.42). These endeavours altogether can be utilized to improve feelings of insecurity. Analysing the faults within these measures however, provides further evidence to why ethnic conflict is unavoidable.

Demonstrations of respect to minority groups as well as power sharing are examples of effective management that should be used to reduce insecurity (Lake and Rothschild 1996, p.42). Both methods were successful within South Africa's 1993-1999 Unity government, where constitutional arrangements improved minority group's representation at regional and government levels (De Villiers, 2013 p.662). Formal power sharing, was effective in maintaining peace in South Africa between separate groups, demonstrating how effective management could prevent conflict (De Villiers, 2013 p.662). Despite this evidence, Lake and Rothschild themselves acknowledge the possible difficulties power sharing can cause. They consider situations where majority elites are unwilling to respond to minority demands, potentially causing more conflict (Lake and Rothschild 1996, p.59). This problem with effective management was displayed in South Sudan 2016, where power-sharing agreements broke down between Riek-Machar and Salva Kiir, escalating violence between government and rebel forces.

Decreasing historical insecurities of rival ethnic groups is understandably a difficult task in nations with long histories of violence. In consideration of Posen's analysis on the causes of conflict, the reduction of these insecurities is necessary for ethnic conflict to be avoidable (Posen 1993, p.27). Lake and Rothschild also propose third-party intervention as a way to counter the discussed insecurities. International intervention is proposed as effective in reducing conflict because third-party bodies such as UN coalitions can bring leaders together for mediation (Lake and Rothschild 1996, p.65). This argument is useful for mediation as a process can result in groups forming political agreements that can reduce conflict. Despite this possibility, intervention as discussed earlier contains multiple

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problems.

Firstly, intervention can be viewed negatively by those in power as a breach of state sovereignty. This undermines processes of mediation if leaders are unwilling to cooperate. Furthermore, Reuveny et al's research produced empirical evidence demonstrating that third-party intervention is only successful when it is focused on ending fighting only (Reuveney et all 2011, p.709). Politicising intervention and choosing sides can result in long term failures. This problem was demonstrated in Somalia 1993, where, the favouring of leader Ali Mahdi Mohamed over Mohamed Farah Aideed by the international community failed to reduce long-term insecurity in the nation (Lake and Rothschild 1996, p.67). Examples like this demonstrate the difficulties in reducing ethnic insecurity. Without the removal of insecurity, the prevention of the security dilemma is problematic, demonstrating why effective management and intervention fail to avoid conflict.

Preventative Diplomacy and Institutionalism

De Figueiredo and Weingast consider elites with selfish agendas as main instigators of conflict. In cases where individual elites control the actions of large factions, Jentleson's proposal of preventative diplomacy is useful. Preventive diplomacy posits external actors as important to implement early intervention, where ethnic tensions have risen. As a method, it seeks both peaceful intervention and discussion with elites of groups, to promote dialogue for negotiation (Jentleson 1996, p.11). Jentleson attempts to strengthen arguments for preventative diplomacy, arguing it was successful in avoiding the spread of conflict between Croatia and Bosnia to Macedonia in the early 1990s (Jentleson 1996, p.11). He argues that US warning to Serbia's Milosevic against the treatment of Albanians in Kosovo, along with an international presence in Macedonia prevented ethnic conflict spilling to Kosovo and Macedonia (Jentleson 1996, p.11). Jentleson' s research is sadly contradicted by the unfolding events after his policy report of 1996. The escalation of violent conflict in Kosovo 1998 displayed the major failures of preventive policies. Violence in Macedonia subsequently escalated in 2001, with ethnic divides being a major source of both conflicts (Lyon 2002, p.285). Tackling the effects of elites through negotiation was unsuccessful in decreasing tensions in the region. Jentleson' s policy report is a useful example of the restricted and short-term nature of most approaches to avoiding conflict. It demonstrates the optimistic nature of approaches, but ultimately provides evidence suggesting that conflict is unavoidable in the long-term.

Wolff also considers diplomacy, combined with leadership and institutionalism as a method of avoidance (Wolff 2010). In consideration of elites as the major cause of conflict, Wolff's proposition seeks to engage elites into forming compromises as a way to de-escalate tensions. Northern Ireland's 1998 peace agreement can be used as an example which supports Wolff's claims. Local leaders were able to negotiate together, and compromise to create peace. These compromises were implemented through institutions, demonstrating the importance of institutions within peace processes (Wolff 2010). Wolf's approach to avoidance is most useful within this analysis due to his emphasis on the importance of engaging leaders of conflict. In consideration of De Figueiredo and Weinagast's explanations however, compromise may be impeded if negotiation fails to adhere to the interests of some leaders. Furthermore, Wolff's argument relies on established institutions to implement agreements. As a consequence, states without strong institutions would find it difficult to carry out agreements. Although useful, Wolff fails to consider situations where institutions are weak and elites do not abide by negotiations such as the Darfur peace agreement of 2006. He fails to provide a flexible approach that can be applied to less developed countries with ethnic tensions. Contradictions like these and their results in application will be analysed within the following case study of Sudan.

Section 3: Case Study – Darfur 2003

Taking into account the relevant research within section two, the following case study seeks to analyse the application of preventive methods discussed, to the conflict in Darfur Sudan. After considering the impact preventive methods have had on a modern ethnic conflict, this paper will be able to produce qualitative evidence on the possibility of prevention.

Context

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Post-colonialism the majority of land in the southern Darfur region was populated by the ethnically black Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa tribes (Reyna 2004, p.1299). Following the 1989 military coup in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, Omar al Bashir an Arab rose to power. Prior to Bashir's regime land disputes led to attacks on Black African farmers by Arab-nomads throughout the 1980s (Totten 2011, p.12). Bashir escalated tensions early in the 1990s by splitting Darfur into three states, making the tribes minorities in each state (Reyna 2004, p.1299).

During this same period, increased desertification in the form of droughts due to a lack of rainfall produced the massive migration of Arab-Nomads to southern Darfur (Reyna 2004, p.1299). Small scale conflicts continued to escalate between Arabs and Blacks from 1989-1999, with local leaders taking the side of Arabs in the region. Arab majority within government increased beliefs of Arab supremacism which were used to justify the maltreatment of Blacks (Totten 2011, p.14). Lack of protection by local governments resulted in the creation of rebel defence groups, in the form of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) (Totten 2011, p.14). Finally, in 2003 a series of organised rebel attacks by the SLA and JEM on government bases were countered with government attacks on Darfur villages. Armed Arab groups such as the Janjaweed began to commit numerous atrocities on tribes, including killing, rape, torture and genocide (Reyna 2004, p.1300). Current reported humanitarian abuses in 2017, still involve killing, rape, use of chemical weapons, destruction and displacement (HRW 2017). These allegations demonstrate the failures of the international community to prevent the continuation of the Darfur conflict.

Application of Discussed Methods

Buchanan's recommendations on reducing conflict by decreasing economic disparities, when applied to Darfur failed to reduce violence. This preventive method was attempted and established through the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur 2011. Signed by the Government of Sudan and the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) the agreement sought to distribute wealth more evenly (among other goals) between separate groups as a way to decrease tensions (Dullaghan 2016). Lack of support by a large majority of other rebel groups effected its ability to successfully decrease tensions in the region. Dullaghan notes that other groups declined the signature and went on to form the Sudan Revolutionary Front who have continued fighting with the government (Dullaghan 2016). This unfortunate evidence demonstrates that economic development can only prevent conflict if all parties agree to development goals. These results reject Buchanan's proposals displaying why economic development fails to prevent conflict.

The migration of Arabs to southern Darfur resulted in population growths, which Hampson and Malone correctly assumed, led to contention. Their propositions for combatting conflict due to resources proposed engagement of the UN and its wider agencies. When applied to Darfur their suggestions sadly also resulted in failures. The use of UN agencies and Security Council powers had a limited effect on preventing future violence in Darfur. Totten notes that the UN issued various sanctions between 2004 and 2011, "demanding that Sudan disarm the militias operating in Darfur; and the referral Darfur conflict to the International Criminal Court" (Totten 2011, p.19). Following the HRW report of 2017, it is apparent that the disarming of militias has not occurred in Darfur due to continuing attacks by opposing factions. Furthermore, the introduction of the potential use of chemical weapons highlights a greater concern, indicating an increase in human rights abuses (HRW 2017). Hampson and Malone's arguments on the successes of the UN as a mechanism which prevents future violence are disproven in Darfur. As a consequence, their failures provide substantial evidence against ethnic conflict being avoidable.

Lake and Rothschild's proposals on the effects of effective management and third-party intervention on reducing violence are also disproven by events in Darfur. As outlined in section two they suggest that international coalitions intervening in conflict can accelerate processes of peace and mediation (Lake and Rothschild 1996, p.65). An example of this type of process was attempted in Darfur, with coalitions consisting of African Union, United Nations, European Union and US troops working together in 2004. The first coalition led by the AU failed to initiate peace as well as any process for mediation as violence intensified (Totten 2011, p.20). Increased International pressure led to the Darfur peace agreement of 2006 between the government and rebels. Examples of effective management as discussed by Lake and Rothschild were established within the agreement, such as Article 2 which sets the guidelines for power sharing between groups (Darfur peace Agreement 2006). Both parties signed the agreements ultimately seeking to end the long-lasting conflict. Despite the signing and its witnessing, both sides quickly failed to adhere to

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the agreements (Totten 2011, p.24). Violence unfortunately continued in Darfur in 2006, demonstrating the failures of third party-intervention and effective management as methods of preventing ethnic conflict.

Conclusion

Discussion

Altogether the results in section three provide evidence that the application of section two's preventive methods, were unable to avoid conflict. Totten's arguments particularly supported the position of this paper, with his research indicating international responses as failures. This position was supported in section three's application of discussed methods, where economic development, engagement of the UN, effective management and third-party intervention, all failed to avoid conflict.

Despite these failures it is important to acknowledge that effective management processes were never fully implemented in 2006. Although methods such as power sharing were agreed between parties, Omar al Bashir's government did not implement them at the time, demonstrating issues with labelling effective management as a complete failure. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that there are many other types of preventive methods this paper has ignored such as military intervention and social development, which have had varying results in avoiding ethnic conflict. If taken from a different angle the research within this paper could have provided more balanced arguments demonstrating possible ways ethnic conflict could be avoided.

Nevertheless, I analysed the failures of preventative methods purposefully to demonstrate the weaknesses of current approaches to avoidance. The case study of Darfur in comparison highlighted the difficulties in avoiding conflict. Nations with histories of ethnic violence mixed with fractionalised communities were proven to be more prone to conflict (Wegenast and Basedau 2013, p. 433). The international community's response to Darfur as a result has failed to reduce ethnic tensions as well as the increasing number of deaths. The current approaches to the conflict as Jentleson indicated often involved peace talks and discussion with political leaders. The case study highlights specifically however, that diplomatic discussion despite agreements can still fail to prevent the escalation of conflict, if resolutions are not put into action quickly.

Recommendations

A combination of Wolff, Hampson and Malone's proposals would be useful in tackling escalating tensions. Establishing peace agreements through negotiation are an important component to preventing conflict from escalating into violent conflict. Wolff's proposals are the most effective in comparison to others, for he considers ways to maintain peace through leadership and institutions. The maintenance of peace agreements in places with weak institutions such as Darfur can only be sustained through efforts by the international community. As a consequence, continuous engagement of UN bodies as proposed by Hampson and Malone are necessary measures in sustaining peace where ethnic tensions are high.

Despite the possible successes in applying these methods the research within this paper indicates that political obstacles prevent the possibility of avoiding conflict. As demonstrated in section two in Rwanda 1994, where individual gains were not present, member states of the UN did not intervene and prevent genocide. Until the international community truly prioritises human security over the security of the state, leaders will deliberately continue to avoid intervening in conflicts without individual gains. This underlying factor is why I believe ethnic conflict in the current system we live in is not avoidable in many cases. This revelation established through the evidence within this paper indicates the importance of state sovereignty and its effect on decisions needs to reduce to avoid conflict. Papers like this should be used to provide future evidence to why international intervention in states with increasing ethnic tensions is necessary. This alongside optimism and multilateral efforts are needed if we hope to avoid violent ethnic conflicts.

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Date Written: January 2018